

## Medical volunteers treat Biloxi, Miss., residents as they begin rebuilding their homes and lives.

BY AMY SOPER  
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BILOXI, Miss. — Three chairs placed in the corridor of College Heights Apartments in Biloxi became Tom Kerr's treatment center Monday.

"Now this won't burn at all," the family nurse practitioner from Lafayette explained to a 10-year-old girl as he placed gauze around the little toe of her left foot. Just seconds before he'd applied a briefly stinging alcohol cleanser.

Holding the girl's foot, he shuffled through his canvas medical supply bag searching for antibiotic lotion to give to his young patient, Demonica Price.

"Can you hold this?" Kerr asked, continuing with a series of deliberate, but conversational questions. "You know what? You're going to be my nurse assistant."

Kerr is one of about 230 volunteers providing assistance to Hurricane Katrina victims through Operation Hoosier Relief. He and a few other volunteers visited the apartment complex after learning several residents lacked transportation and health care.

Price, who was at her Biloxi home when the storm hit, cut her toe on a shard of glass. She was at

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# Medical mission

## Volunteer health professionals from Indiana are treating the sick, injured

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BILOXI, Miss. — John Stuart stretched out on a green Army cot, streaks of dried blood on his left leg from a gash in the outer thigh.

A chainsaw cut brought Stuart to the free medical clinic operated by volunteers from Memorial Hospital of South Bend, part of Operation Hoosier Relief. The effort consists of about 230 volunteers helping hurricane-ravaged parts of Mississippi.

Christopher Hall, a family physician from South Bend, said the clinic began in a small yellow tent in the parking lot of a shopping center. It grew as people donated trailers, medicines and time. He said the hurricane flattened 90 percent of doctors' offices in the Biloxi area. Local hospitals are not yet operating at full capacity either.

"A lot of the injuries are happening as people get back in houses and are

### Inside

◆ Local Red Cross has processed 46 cases related to Hurricane Katrina. **Page 3A**

◆ Saint Francis professor returns from helping with relief efforts. **Page 3A**

◆ NFL's Saints get word on where they will play this season. **Page 1S**

### Online

◆ For-up-to-date information about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, go to [www.news-sentinel.com](http://www.news-sentinel.com).



cleaning up," Hall said. "They're up on roofs, then falling and breaking or twisting limbs."

About 45 minutes before he was injured, Stuart, 41, of Biloxi, was using a chainsaw to clear trees downed by Hurricane Katrina from the yards of

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### Your questions

As the world focuses on the life-and-death issues caused by Hurricane Katrina, many of those not directly affected by the tragedy have some basic questions about how the storm will touch their lives.

**Q:** Who will pay medical costs for poor children and adults displaced by the storm?

**A:** Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program will provide care under new emergency guidelines announced Friday that allow evacuees to receive care. Host states will be asked to make a reasonable attempt to verify eligibility, but mandatory production of financial records and documents will be waived.

The same guidelines apply to evacuees seeking child care, mental health services, substance-abuse treatment, food stamps, housing, foster care, school lunches, unemployment compensation and job training.

# MEDICAL: Volunteers are meeting needs

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relatives.

Stuart was still wearing his soiled work gloves and a bandanna around his head as a doctor in scrubs supervised a medical student who was sawing the torn flesh together in a makeshift surgery Sunday afternoon.

"Our houses are OK. There was no death or injury except this," said Stuart. "I was using a chainsaw to cut a tree limb, and it bounced back at me and cut my leg."

Other workers from South Bend are making house calls to deliver prescription medicines to people like Myrtes Dickerson.

Dickerson, who has heart problems and can't walk, sat on a bed in her home even though its roof was covered in plastic and its front was in shambles, crushed by a roof blown off a nearby church. Registered nurses Erin Parrish and Greg Bingham delivered Dickerson's prescriptions via ambulance.

"We've gone on quite a few home visits this morning," Bingham said. "There was a 92-year-old man living in squalor, and neighbors were concerned because he has gout, a heart condition, and he's blind."

Several patients crowded into another clinic, one Indiana volunteers opened Sunday. In a small room at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, a doctor and nurses maneuvered around stacks of plastic chairs, computer equipment and each other. They began seeing patients even before they could organize the center.

Donna Groan, a registered nurse from Charlestown, Ind., was giving tetanus shots. She said the shots are needed because of unsanitary water people are coming in contact with. Jean Wilson, of Biloxi, said she suffered cuts and scratches while working in her mother's home, which was filled



ABOVE: Athena LaFort, University of Alabama medical student, assists Dr. Christopher Hall, of Memorial Hospital of South Bend, in stitching up Biloxi, Miss., resident John Stuart, 41, after Stuart was injured while cutting down a tree Sunday. Hall and other medical personnel from Operation Hoosier Relief were working out of a clinic they set up in a shopping mall parking lot in Biloxi.

LEFT: Biloxi pediatrician Dr. Mitchell Gruch speaks of the kindness of people who have brought baby formula, water and much-needed medical supplies to the hungry children of Biloxi. He was gathering a few more supplies Sunday morning at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church.

By Ellie Rogue of The News-Sentinel



with dirty water and mud, Monday. Wilson and her granddaughter, Madison Gee, 6, both got tetanus shots. Wilson was able to retrieve two rosaries and a blanket

her sister crocheted from her mother's home. "My mom used it last night to sleep with," she said. Wilson, her husband, her mother, her daughter

her son-in-law, granddaughter and three dogs are now sharing a three-bedroom house.

"The main thing is everyone is alive."

## TETANUS: Shots are one priority in Biloxi

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the apartment complex visiting her aunt.

"It was scary," she said of the storm. "It was horrible, and you could hear people screaming for help. One of my mom's friends died."

With the help of another apartment resident providing Spanish translation, Beth Dekoninck went door to door assessing medical needs at the 120-unit complex. Dekoninck is a nurse-practitioner from Francesville. In the back-ground, hammers pounded away, nailing blue tarps to leaky and non-existent roofs.

"There's definitely a need for tetanus shots," Dekoninck said. Garbage piled up in yards and dumpsters, and disease-carrying insects filled the area.

Don Tagala, 26, of Biloxi, works in the apartment complex's office and said he has been trying to get the garbage removed.

"There's something rotting in there," he said pointing to a trash receptacle. He said 12 of the 120 apartments survived the storm unscathed, one of which was his. "I'm one of the lucky ones. There was water up to the ceiling of the first-floor apartments."

Elsewhere at the complex, Peggy Welch gave tetanus shots to waiting residents. Welch is a registered nurse and state representative from Bloomington.

"This is my home state. I was a child when Hurricane Camille came through," she said. "I lived in the Jackson, Miss., area and moved when I was 20. This is very significant to me."



Nurse-practitioner Beth Dekoninck, of Francesville, Ind., uses an apartment resident to translate Monday as she went door to door assessing and treating the medical needs of a hurricane-damaged apartment complex in Biloxi, Miss.

By Ellie Rogue of The News-Sentinel