# Web Site Provides Evacuee's Medication History

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*Senior Writer*

A broad coalition of public and private sector groups has launched a secure Web site where physicians and pharmacists can access medication histories for patients who were evacuated from their homes in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The Web site—www.KatrinaHealth.org—can be accessed from any location around the country by authorized physicians and pharmacists who are treating evacuees.

The effort is aimed at providing timely information to help physicians renew prescriptions, prescribe new medications, and coordinate care for the hundreds of thousands of people who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina—many with chronic health conditions.

"With access to [these records], physicians I think can begin to piece together medical histories and avoid drug interactions and renew prescriptions that are vital to these patients' health," J. Edward Hill, M.D., president of the American Medical Association, said during a telephone briefing to announce the launch of www.KatrinaHealth.org.

Dr. Hill, a family physician in Tupelo, Miss., had been working on the front lines of this disaster in a makeshift clinic in the days following the hurricane. That work made him aware of just how much health care information was missing on these patients, he said. And the information only becomes more critical as patients are scattered across the country, far from their homes and regular doctors, he said.

The network of prescription data was initially tested at seven shelters in the Gulf Coast region. In late September, the information was made available nationwide.

The effort, which has been facilitated by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, also includes more than 150 organizations that helped to plan, test, and launch the site.

The information in the network comes from electronic databases from commercial pharmacies, government health insurance programs, private insurers, and pharmacy benefits managers in states affected by the storm.

At press time, the network contained more than 1 million patient records representing more than 7 million prescriptions, according to Kevin Hutchinson, president and CEO of SureScripts, an electronic-prescribing service provider.

> **With access to these records, physicians can avoid drug interactions and renew prescriptions.**
>
> DR. HILL

On the Web site, physicians can obtain allergy information; view prescription history as well as drug interaction and therapeutic duplication reports; and query clinical pharmacology drug information. To ensure that only authorized physicians use the site, the AMA is authenticating the identity and qualifications of every physician before they can use the site.

Physicians who want access to the site can contact AMA's 24-hour Unified Service Center at 800-262-3211 to obtain a username and password. But the sponsors of the site caution physicians not to rely too heavily on the information. The data may have errors of duplication or omission because it has been collected from multiple sources. For privacy and security reasons, the site does not include information relating to some classes of drugs approved or commonly used to treat mental illness, chemical dependency, or HIV/AIDS.

And not all evacuees' information is available on the site, though the information is being added on a rolling basis.

The www.KatrinaHealth.org effort could also provide some lessons for the overall effort to increase adoption of health information technology, said David J. Brailer, M.D., national coordinator of health information technology for HHS. But the site itself is not intended for long-term use, he said. Regarding patients relocated as a result of hurricane Rita, at press time his office was in discussions with local officials about whether they might want to use the site.

Dr. Brailer said his office will perform an after-action analysis of the site to see what worked, what didn't, and what can be learned from the effort. ∎