

# The Health Center

Missouri Primary Care Association

Special Edition



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## CHCs Respond to Nature's Wrath

**S**o far, 2011 has proven to be a heavy-hearted year for many in the great state of Missouri. As early as January, record-breaking amounts of precipitation began to pummel the state in the form of ice and snow. As spring dawned, few could have guessed that the winter which had closed entire cities and cut off transportation would melt into a season of catastrophic weather that would scar our state and capture the attention of an entire nation. Through it all, as victims and their families struggle to be made whole and others are still bracing for additional flooding, Missouri's Community Health Centers have continued to extend helping hands.



Since 2002, the Missouri Primary Care Association (MPCA) has received federal funding to assist the community health centers (CHC) with their emergency preparedness activities which include develop/enhance emergency plans, strengthen local/state partnerships, purchase of personal protective equipment, and education. Funding has been made available through the Hospital Preparedness Program of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Without this vital funding and preparation, the natural disasters that have devastated Missouri in 2011 would have been far more perilous.

This special edition of *The Health Center* seeks to portray the plight of our fellow Missourians and to honor those tireless CHC volunteers who are giving their time and resources to help wherever they can.

## Our Mission:

*To be Missouri's leader in shaping policies and programs that improve ACCESS to high quality, community based, and affordable primary health services.*



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## **CHCs Respond to Nature's Wrath (continued from Page 1)**

Before highlighting these restorative efforts, *The Health Center* takes a moment to recall those crucial days this past spring when the face of Missouri began to change.



### **April 22, 2011, Good Friday**

*St. Louis, MO.* As the day draws to a close and residents are settling into the first evening of a holiday weekend, the weather is just beginning to pick up. Shortly before 8pm, an EF-4 tornado touches down at Creve Coeur Lake. It travels a devastating 22 mile path through Maryland Heights, Bridgeton, St. Ann, Edmundson, Lambert Airport, Berkeley, Ferguson, and finally Madison County near Granite City before dissipating.

Missourians watch in shock as cellphone and surveillance footage airs on news stations statewide of an unsuspecting Lambert International Airport being torn to bits while people inside run for cover. In nearby communities, massive trees topple, cars are crushed, and roofs and walls collapse, leaving many who have lived in their homes for more than half a century suddenly homeless. The next morning, the sun rises on millions of dollars of damage.

### **April 25, 2011**

*Southeast Missouri.* One hundred thirty miles south of St. Louis, the threat of flooding is looming. Within four days, the threat becomes a reality as 15 inches of rain pummel the region. By midweek, the Black River pours over the levee in no less than 30 places. An extensive flood wall is also breached, allowing surging waters to wipe out two small communities.

The forecast is relentless. Another line of storms moving through Oklahoma and Texas brings more flooding, stretching from Texas to Louisiana and up to Tennessee. More Missourians are forced to evacuate. The failing Mississippi River levees leave no one untouched.

Governor Jay Nixon declares a State of Emergency and calls in the Missouri National Guard to assist the region. Days later, a new series of storms overwhelm more levee systems along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and additional National Guard members from several states are mobilized.

The rain keeps coming.

### **May 22, 2011**

*Joplin, MO.* Residents of the small southern Missouri city are enjoying a Sunday afternoon as dark clouds grow on the horizon. Inside the clouds, building quickly and heading toward them is the deadliest recorded tornado in U.S. history.

Less than half an hour later, a third of the town lies in utter ruin covering victims both dead and alive. St. John's Hospital and its emergency vehicles are severely damaged. Only an empty shell remains where the city's primary source of emergency care once stood. Its ambulances lie twisted and crushed, unable to transfer the injured to facilities in neighboring towns.



A week passes and, as the death toll climbs, merciless rain and storms repeatedly batter the survivors searching for lost loved ones beneath the rubble of homes and businesses. Missouri and the nation reel in horror as photos emerge of a town that looks nothing short of a crumbling warzone.

## Takin' it to the Streets

**B**JK People's Health Center. Anxious to help victims of the Good Friday tornado, CEO Dwayne Butler assembled staff with volunteers at Amanda Luckett Murphy Hopewell Center and Shalom Church City of Peace to discuss what could be done.

Demolished homes and vehicles along with downed trees and power lines complicated travel for many residents. In addition, fear of looting meant that most were afraid to leave their homes to seek medical care or other necessary supplies.

The solution? BJK People's Health Center's *Healthy Living Series* mobile van.

Loaded down with staff and filled with supplies, for three days, The Healthy Living Series mobile van went into the communities to deliver much needed food, water, and clothing door to door. Victims like Anita McComb, whose home was severely damaged, were grateful for the assistance. "I think it's fantastic because we need all the help we can," she said to KPLR News out of St. Louis.



Aside from basic necessities, volunteers offered blood pressure checks and referrals to medical teams and mental health experts. Dwayne Butler stressed the importance of these services after a community suffers such great loss. "Often times, we're aware of the physical damage that's done in the community and in these moments we forget to take care of our own personal health and our behavioral health."

Daycare centers, churches, and schools were converted into staging centers for shelter and supply distribution and the van delivered much needed clothing, food, and water to aid their efforts.

In spite of the devastation, many meteorologists marveled that more damage was not done. St. Louis, they said, had escaped the loss of life they had come to expect from tornadoes of that magnitude. The storm that had contained all the ingredients to kill had spared Missourians' lives, if not their homes and business. More than once, residents, thankful to be alive, expressed that "It could have been worse."

They were right. The worst was yet to come.



## Feeling the Effects

**A**s the flooding in the Southeast Missouri encroached, Southeast Missouri Health Network (SEMOHN) began operating at a minimal level. Rising waters forced relocation of their main server and closure of four of their three clinics for three days. Flooded homes and road closures meant that 1 in 5 SEMOHN employees were unable to come to work. Though SEMOHN buildings had escaped damaging flood waters, the combination of closed clinics and cancelled appointments meant a significant financial drain was soon felt in daily operations.

### SEMOHN RESPONDS

Very quickly, the overwhelming need for immediate action became clear. While state and federal agencies still scrambled to coordinate the mobilization of the National Guard, SEMOHN sent in a Relief Team to assist flooded communities. Team members assisted community residents who had begun vigorously sandbagging. A local rodeo stage served as a starting point for an assembly line that managed to fill 15,000 sandbags over the course of four days.



By day four, flood ravaged counties of Missouri were engaged in evacuation efforts. Responding quickly, SEMOHN contacted the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) requesting \$25,000 to assist the flood victims. An abbreviated application process ensured the funds would be carefully directed to those most in need. Within 72 hours, 100 families within the SEMOHN service area and beyond were provided temporary accommodations, storage units, and U-Haul rentals. However, need quickly outstripped resources and the funds were exhausted. Another request to MFH reporting how the funds were used and describing the dramatic increase in flood victims needing assistance saw quick response, and another \$25,000 was provided to assist in the relief efforts.

In addition to administering the MFH relief funds, SEMOHN Relief teams negotiated with area motels to provide blocks of rooms for displaced flood victims at lower rates. By the first week of May, over 1,000 area residents were given up to five day accommodations at one of these motels.





Once displaced residents were safely housed in local motels, a team of nurses went door to door to assess general wellbeing and determine the need for additional medical attention, both immediate and longterm. Among those displaced, a high incidence of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and asthma was discovered. Consistent care and access to medicine is critical to patients with these conditions and many, forced to evacuate their homes quickly, had left behind or lost these vital medications.

*"I think the main motivation of the staff is the everyday stories told [by the patients] when they visit the clinics for an appointment. You are drawn in to their lives and you feel their joy and their pain....when we have a personal encounter with a flood family and they tell you what they have lost or how they are trying to get back into their homes but can't due to snakes ... you get a visual of how their life took a devastating turn in a matter of hours. Everything they had is destroyed and many of those people did not have flood insurance."*

~ Cheryl White, CEO, SEMOHN

Medication samples in SEMOHN's clinics are limited and, since many residents did not have the means to purchase new medication, contact was made with Direct Relief USA. As a result, Direct Relief USA partnered with SEMOHN to provide 180 boxes of maintenance medications for evacuees with chronic health conditions. Within a few days of the initial contact, the precious shipment arrived. Soon, calls began to come in from other willing partners, including Americares, who shipped an additional 40 boxes of crucial chronic care medication.

Another vital partner in relief efforts was the American Red Cross. SEMOHN staff assisted them at each location daily and at every meal, handing out food to flood victims and reevaluating ever-changing needs. Over 1,300 flood victims were fed two hot meals a day from April 29 to May 1. National Guard members, city and county workers, and local volunteers unable to return home, also received food.

In addition, SEMOHN staff:

- provided vital tetanus shots to workers in areas cut off from medical facilities
- worked with local churches and businesses to establish shelters and clothing centers
- provided portable toilets to a town suffering from an inoperative sewer system
- coordinated with the MPCA to create "Clean-Up" care packages for families re-entering their homes



# THE AFTERMATH

## Joplin, MO: Where the Streets Have No Name

**B**y 5:30pm, May 22, ACCESS Family Care's Joplin Clinic was the only medical clinic still operational in the hard-hit community of Joplin, MO. The ACCESS Ozark Center was not so fortunate. Like so many other homes and businesses in Joplin, it was barely recognizable.

That night, as victims of the worst tornado recorded in U.S. history were discovering that St. John's Hospital had been incapacitated by the deadly storm, Dr. Bentlage, Dr. Prater, Dr. Jumper, PNP Rebecca Hales, and FNP Judith LeWallen left their own communities and began the drive across a flooded southern Missouri route, anxious to assist.

Although ACCESS Family Care was still intact, critical medical care provision was still limited. The clinic normally provided primary care services, but the tornado had left many with critical, life-threatening injuries too severe to be treated by primary providers alone. In addition, communications were severed as IT providers and phone lines, struck by the storm, lost service. Cell phone service was choppy at best. People could not afford to wait.

An already crippled Missouri was facing another long battle.



### SHOCK & AWE

Executive Director Don McBride and staff at ACCESS Family Care busily tracked one another down. All had miraculously survived, but four employees' homes were completely demolished. Life in Joplin had been irrevocably altered, but the inevitable emotions would have to wait. Survivors – many now homeless - needed immediate critical care and, with St. John's Hospital gone, they fortified themselves for an onslaught of injured patients coming through the doors of the clinic. A triage was set up in their waiting room. Everyone waited, but the flow of patients was thin.

They later learned that injured residents were not coming because looting had already begun in the city streets, and people were afraid to leave what was left of their homes. Others had lost all forms of transportation in the storm and lived too far away from any of the city's make-shift triage sites.

Body bags dotted the landscape. While St. John's moved as quickly as possible to raise emergency hospital tents and a surgical hospital, rain and storms continue to pound the residents. The city was overwhelmed.

### **SEMOHN: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS**

*Day Four.* Though still engrossed in the flood crisis of Southeast Missouri, CEO, Cheryl White, of Southeast Missouri Health Network, arrived on the scene with staff, supplies, and a generator. The same floods that had tormented Missouri in the weeks before had actually prepared SEMOHN staff for the very crisis that had left Joplin residents and volunteers in an understandable daze. Cheryl White, cool headed and armed with hard-won knowledge, was a welcome face in the door of ACCESS Family Care. Together, ACCESS and SEMOHN staff began the task of appraising need and gathering critical resources. The long weeks of building partnerships in Southeast Missouri, organizing aid to communities who found themselves homeless, and treating those cut off from critical health care were suddenly and miraculously paying off.

Don McBride received word that the partners who had stepped in to aid flood victims were ready and willing to extend those same helping hands to ACCESS Family Care's now devastated community. Generous funding was on its way from Missouri Foundation for Health. Direct Relief International and Americares would donate chronic care medication, supplies, and funds, and Convoy of Hope soon met to discuss volunteer efforts to clean up debris.

ACCESS Family Care was designated as the official repository and dispensary of donated medications and with the joint efforts of Tim Mitchell of Family Pharmacy in Neosho, staff inside the warehouse began to organize and distribute essential supplies to storm victims. Meanwhile, the stream of injured patients remained steady. New injuries from searching and sifting through debris meant an increase in puncture wounds and the need for tetanus vaccination. ACCESS Family Care's



# THE AFTERMATH (continued)

## Joplin, MO: Where the Streets Have No Name

COO, Debra Davidson, was on hand to travel to multiple sites distributing fresh supplies of the dwindling vaccine. Near the high school, staff erected tents and set up grills, greeting tired but resilient residents and workers with hot meals, care packages, and water. Dr. Leland McCall, ACCESS Family Care's senior dentist, faced a more harrowing task – identifying the remains of a former patient. At the Ozark Center, staff sifted through the remains of the splintered clinic and salvaged anything that might be useful. Everyone began to brace for the deluge of volunteers expected to arrive over Memorial Day weekend and the subsequent need for more tetanus vaccinations.

As the long days passed and service became their solace, ACCESS staff witnessed with gratitude the incredible and compassionate spirit of their neighbors in Missouri. Among them there were both new and familiar faces – faces like Dr. Ian McCaslin, Director of the Missouri Department of Social Services MO HealthNet Division and a good friend to Missouri's CHCs. After visiting with everyone at the clinic, he humbly raised a camping tent, put on a pair of work gloves, and started to clean up

the endless piles of debris. Before the month was up, many more would come – and continue to come. Joplin's ravaged streets, though nameless, were filled with friends.

### A HOPE & A FUTURE

The restoration of Joplin is a long-term commitment. ACCESS Family care continues to partner with the community to move forward, offering supplies, water, trash bags, and other vital necessities. Through a grant from Americares, they have been able to obtain a van to deliver and administer tetanus vaccinations to debris workers who have had triple digit heat indexes to contend with. Chronic care patients are receiving medication until their ability to travel to





a primary care provider is restored, and at least one of the ten dental practices demolished in the tornado is now set up inside ACCESS Family Care's clinic. Consistently changing needs require flexibility. As the initial shock has passed, and those missing have been found, ACCESS has made efforts to work with the community in addressing mental health needs.

### THE ROAD GOES EVER ON

Since the events of the fatal weeks stretching from April 22 to May 22, 2011, Missouri's troubles have continued. Daily, Missourians continue to watch the river rise and their communities prepare for floodplains to fill. In the meantime, images and stories of Joplin, Southeast Missouri flooding, and victims of St. Louis' tornadoes have already begun to fade from the news, but Community Health Center staff are committed to giving Missourians the long-term health care they need.



The road ahead will be long and difficult. Even if every demolished school and every flooded home, church, and community center were restored to its former state, the loss of loved ones – the scars – will remain. In the middle of it all, the MPCA recognizes and is thankful for the extraordinary, stubborn faithfulness of those who are working daily in this battered field to heal, to comfort, and to reassure fellow Missourians that they are not alone.



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## HOW CAN I HELP?

For those interested in helping restoration efforts in the state of Missouri, the MPCA recommends contacting the following agencies who are committed to helping Missouri's disaster victims.

[www.showmeresponse.org](http://www.showmeresponse.org)  
[www.211missouri.org](http://www.211missouri.org)  
[www.convoyofhope.org](http://www.convoyofhope.org)  
[www.ozarksredcross.org](http://www.ozarksredcross.org)

[www.redcrossstl.org](http://www.redcrossstl.org)  
[www.directrelief.org](http://www.directrelief.org)  
[www.americares.org](http://www.americares.org)

The large, stylized MPCA logo is positioned at the bottom right of the slide, with its signature diamond graphic element to the left of the letters.