

Storm flap

By Dana Cook Grossman

By the time this issue of DARTMOUTH MEDICINE reaches readers, it'll be old news that Hurricane Irene caused quite a flap up here in the North Country. Images of historic covered bridges being swept downstream filled the cable news channels. Newspapers brimmed with heartrending stories about families that lost everything to the floodwaters' might. The storm's damage was so severe it even put tiny Vermont on the front page of the *New York Times* for several days running.

But word may not have filtered out about how spotty the storm's impact was. Thankfully, Dartmouth—including DMS and Dartmouth-Hitchcock, as well as the main Dartmouth College campus—was almost completely spared, even though all around the institution houses vanished, livelihoods were erased, roads and bridges were washed out, and some communities were totally cut off.

My husband and I were also among the lucky ones—not a single tree (indeed, nary a twig) fell on our property; we never lost our power; and even our steep dirt driveway didn't show any ill effects from seven inches of rain in one day.

The storm had barely abated before organizations large and small, including Dartmouth, were stepping in to help those who had been affected. Dartmouth's Tucker Foundation organized work crews to assist with hurricane cleanup efforts. The College granted a day of paid leave to any employees who volunteered for an Irene relief project. DH employees navigated road detours and washouts to keep caring for patients—including covering for colleagues unable to make it in. And Dartmouth nurses and physicians have been helping bring medical supplies and care to injured or ill residents of stranded communities.

Take Dr. Robert Gougelet, for example. An emergency physician at DHMC, he is also the director of a northern New England disaster-response collaborative. He's led volunteers on relief efforts in the wake of the 2001 anthrax attacks in New York, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and numerous previous hurricanes, including Katrina in 2005.

Since Irene struck his backyard, he's been traveling much closer to home to help out. The local newspaper, the *Valley News*, tagged along with him one day recently and reported this vignette: "A woman was having a life-threatening allergic reac-

tion in [Rochester, Vt., one of the cut-off towns], and she needed immediate assistance. 'If our paramedics hadn't been there to give her the treatment she needed, she probably wouldn't have done so well,'" said a member of the disaster-response collaborative that Gougelet heads—someone who had come all the way over from Maine to help out in Vermont. Now *that's* being neighborly!

It'll take a while, but the area *will* get back on its feet. Northern New England has always been known for a special combination of toughness (if it's snowing, we just put on chains) and tenderness (if a neighbor has had surgery, homemade dinners materialize after she gets home from the hospital).

The day before Irene's wrath descended on the Upper Valley, I took part in an event that offered another example of the stuff that people around here are made of. The Children's Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD) had scheduled its sixth annual Half-Marathon and 5K for the day that Irene was predicted to hit us—Sunday, August 28.

So the Friday before the race, the organizers had a tough call to make: Proceed as planned on Sunday? Unthinkable, given the weather reports. Cancel? A depressing option, given all the effort that goes into the event. Postpone it? Hard to know what the near future would bring.

Not to be denied, race officials came up with "a cleverly conceived plan . . . to beat Irene to her punch": on just 24 hours' notice, they pulled off the huge event a day early. Tents, portapotties, sound systems, volunteers—all the ingredients for the race were in place by Saturday afternoon.

Among the participants (all of whom also got there a day early) was one of my daughters, a CHaD patient while she was growing up. Joanna is so grateful for the wonderful care she received, for a serious chronic condition, that she ran the half-marathon each of the previous five years and this year did the 5K just six weeks postpartum, while pushing my newest granddaughter in a stroller. Not to mention the fact that all six years, Joanna has been one of the event's top individual fund-raisers.

Despite Irene's best efforts to disrupt the race, it brought in over \$400,000 to support the work of the doctors and nurses at CHaD—good news that even the storm-related flap doesn't diminish. ■

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