

## **Tulane doctors help form mutual aid group to serve communities devastated by Hurricane Ida**

Carolyn Scofield  
scofield@tulane.edu  
504-881-4542



Volunteers set up this free clinic at the Montegut fire station after Hurricane Ida devastated parts of southeast Louisiana. (Photo provided)

The Category 4 storm slammed into Terrebonne Parish with a ferocity that blew out windows, ripped the roofs off buildings and made parts of the community unlivable. The parish's only two hospitals sustained catastrophic damage and area pharmacies didn't have power, leaving many residents with little to no medical help in the days and weeks following the storm. Physicians from Tulane University School of Medicine and LSU Health New Orleans quickly recognized the need.

They'd seen it before.

“Having been through Katrina and recognizing the extensive disruption of health services following such a massive disaster, basic medical care or at least ensuring people had access to medications and refills seemed urgent,” said [Anjali Niyogi](#), MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine & Pediatrics at Tulane University School of Medicine. Niyogi worked in the aftermath of Katrina to develop pop-up medical clinics around New Orleans.

Niyogi collaborated with Annelies DeWulf, MD, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at LSU, to form Southeast Louisiana Mutual Medical Aid (SLaMMA). They reached out to mutual aid groups working in Terrebonne Parish including the Cajun Army and [Another Gulf is Possible](#). The group set up a medical aid stations in Montegut and Chauvin, where faculty physicians, residents, medical students and nurses volunteered their time providing urgent care, wound care and medication refills.

Disruptions in infrastructure and communications created a few unique challenges for the volunteers. “While normally we would have phoned in prescriptions to a pharmacy, poor phone reception prevented us from doing so,” said Niyogi. “We had to coordinate getting paper prescriptions, an increasingly coveted resource these days, or physically go in person to get scripts the pharmacy in case of phone disruption.”

Hurricanes Katrina and Ida devastated southeast Louisiana exactly 16 years apart, but only 12 months separate Ida from the last Category 4 storm to hit the state. Niyogi anticipates SLaMMA jumping into action again in the future.

“We foresee SLaMMA providing medical aid alongside other mutual aid groups in the future on an as-needed basis, remaining nimble to adjust to on-the-ground circumstances and needs.