

Letter from New Orleans: tragedy at stranded hospital

1 September 2005

The World Socialist Web Site received the following email Wednesday describing the desperate situation facing patients and staff at a New Orleans hospital, cut off from the outside world amidst rising flood waters in the stricken city. The letter gives a sense of the plight of the city's residents and the lack of organized aid from local, state or national authorities.

Info on stranded folks in a N.O. hospital

Attention of: anyone

1,200 people—including at least 100 very sick ones—in New Orleans Memorial Hospital need help. They have been waiting for evacuation since yesterday. They are going without the basics, the hospital is surrounded by water and the water is still rising. I believe they have lost electricity, and they have very little in terms of food and water. The water level is expected to rise 9-15 feet today (or over last night).

Attempts to evacuate these people have resulted in only about 100 people being air-lifted out, and a full evacuation, they are being told, will take several days—by which time all supplies and electrical power will be totally gone. There is no air conditioning nor are there any windows, so the people inside are at risk not only due to water levels and lack of supplies, but also from the heat and lack of proper air ventilation.

The below emails are from a friend of mine—Bill Quigley, professor of law at Loyola, New Orleans. His wife is an oncology nurse at Memorial who stayed to care for patients. I received the first email at about 7:00 pm EST last night, and the update at about 10:30 pm EST.

Here is the hospital's location: Memorial Medical Center, 2700 Napoleon Ave., New Orleans, La., 70115.

I am Karen O'Keefe, a DC-based attorney who went to law school at Loyola. I have had a nearly impossible time getting through to relief.

The American Red Cross relief numbers didn't work

(the national one was busy constantly, and the Louisiana one just didn't work), and the FEMA number seems geared for long-term claims, not a need for urgent assistance, and it just said it closed at 6 pm.

After 2 hours my co-worker finally got someone related to rescue—Brandy Janes of the Louisiana DPS. I think that was transferred from La. Homeland Security. The only reasonably prompt response late at that I got when I called to ask for emergency assistance was Gov. Blanco's office.

Dear Friends:

There are about 1,300 people here who need help. I would appreciate it if you could forward this information to federal and state authorities and press in the US and in Louisiana to make sure these sick people are cared for. I am in Memorial Hospital in New Orleans. We have nearly 200 very sick people, hundreds of staff and hundreds more families.

The hospital has some basic electricity but many rooms have no electricity and many stairwells have no electricity. There is no a/c and no external windows. We cannot phone out and can receive few incoming calls. The water is rising and the hospital is already surrounded by water. Once the water hits the first floor, the computers, the email, all intercoms, and all internal communication inside the hospital will cease.

Our phones do not work so this is the only way I can reach out. This is not official but what I have been able to find out from listening to many, many people here.

The City of New Orleans is completely overwhelmed. No electricity. Incredible wind damage and now a broken levee that is flooding the city even further. Please make sure that someone is working to make sure these sick people and their families are helped.

They need care. For hours they have been announcing that patients are going to be medivaced (is this a word?) to other hospitals and shelters. But little real action so

far. I know there is much, much to do out there, but these sick people need attention asap.

Please reach out in whatever way you can to make sure these folks are cared for.

Peace and love,

Bill Quigley

Update

There are well over 1,200 people still in the Tenet Memorial Hospital on Napoleon in New Orleans. Predictions are that flood waters will continue to rise another 9 feet tonight. Latest info is that they have started helicoptering out people, but very small numbers, less than 100 since 1 pm.

Giving you this update because we may have no electricity before long. Our phone numbers are 504-897-4531 and 504-897-4530. We cannot call out.

Feel free to call us or give numbers to media to call us. They are estimating that it may take several days to evacuate these people. Water, electricity, food, security—all will be gone by then. Please help by notifying the press and the government. People are hoping that friends around the country can help out.

Thanks for giving people hope.

Peace,

Bill Quigley



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