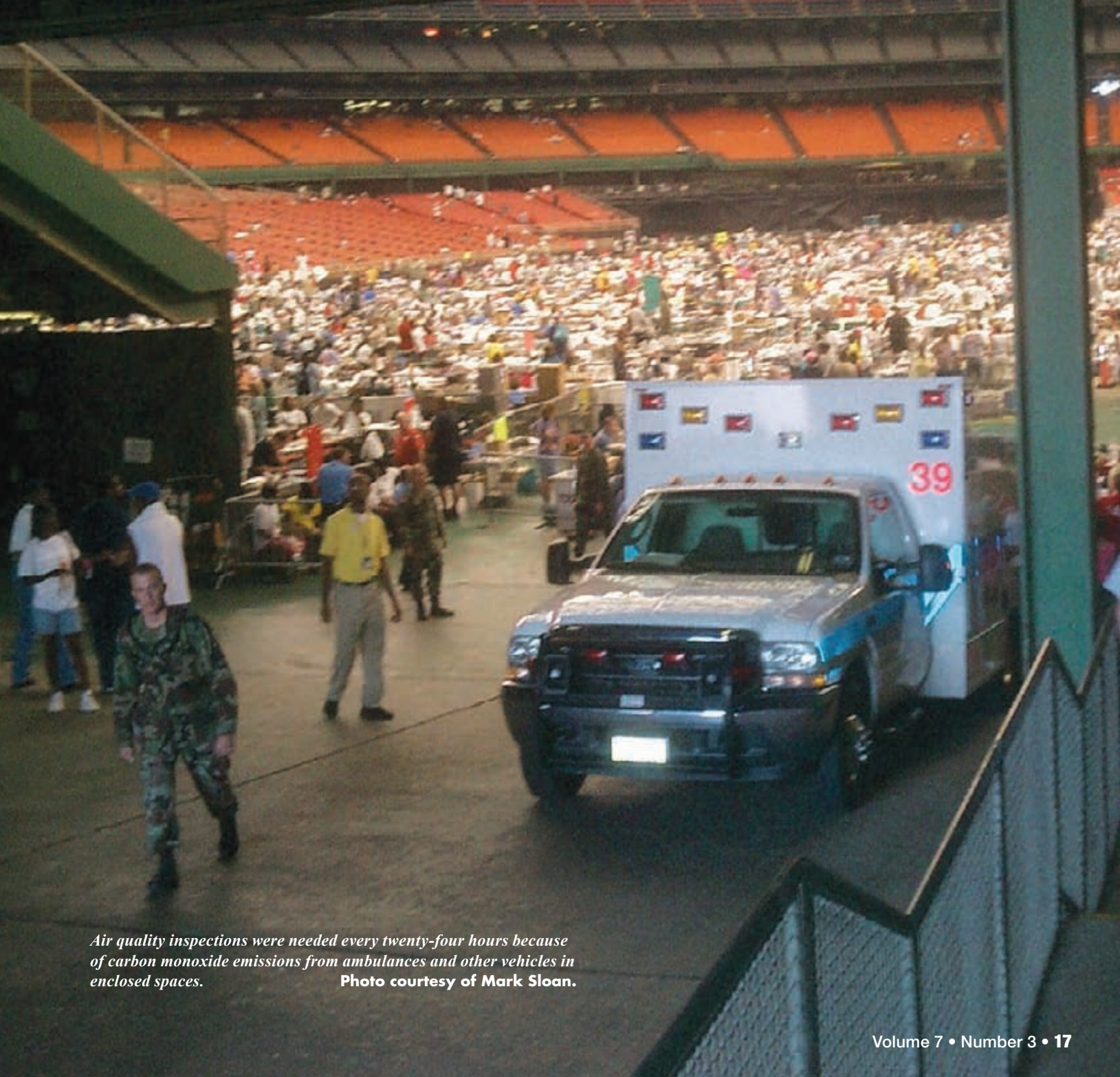


Serving the Medical Needs of Houston's "Guest Citizens"

Conversations with Dr. Kenneth Mattox, David Lopez,
Dr. David Persse, Diana Rodriguez, and Ernesto Valdés

Thousands of volunteers worked in patient care and behind the scenes to provide for the medical needs of the folks who sought refuge in Houston after Hurricane Katrina. These doctors and medical personnel shed light on a portion of that story.



Air quality inspections were needed every twenty-four hours because of carbon monoxide emissions from ambulances and other vehicles in enclosed spaces.

Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.

Dr. Kenneth Mattox: Organizing Medical Care at the Astrodome

Dr. Mattox served as co-director of the medical branch response to Hurricane Katrina along with Lieutenant Joe Leonard from the Coast Guard. Mattox is a professor and vice chairman of surgery at Baylor College of Medicine and chief of staff at Ben Taub General Hospital. He assisted in the development of the Emergency Medical Services of the Houston Fire Department ambulance service and is a member of the American College of Surgeons Trauma Network. He is the author/editor of *Trauma*, which includes a discussion of immediate response to disasters with regard to both injuries and infrastructure. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Dr. Mattox at his office on July 20, 2006.

ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV): In your research of disasters, did you build different models to respond to different types of events?

KENNETH MATTOX (KM): Yes, we have been involved in model development and scientific analysis. How many people are really hurt, and how many people die? Of those who don't die immediately, how many come to the hospital? For those that come to the hospital and are looked at, how many are really sick how many emergency rooms do we need, how many doctors do we need, how many operating rooms do we need? . . . Do we really need radiation detection, do we really need a lot of caches of drugs and supplies? What do you need from a manpower and supply standpoint, from the medical standpoint, from the hospital standpoint, from the rescue standpoint to take care of a population? . . .



Dr. Mattox, right, and David Lopez worked tirelessly to ensure that the medical needs of the evacuees were taken care of as quickly as possible.

Photo courtesy of David Lopez.

It is *extremely* consistent. For instance, with any disaster, there are going to be people who die immediately. . . . Those people that are alive after the initial event, only ten percent will need to seek out health care; and of those who come to

a hospital emergency room, even though a lot may look bad, only ten percent have life-threatening injuries. . . . If you get a population, you know how many people are going to have diabetes, cancer, what kind of cancer they are going to have, what percentage have heart disease, hypertension, [and] asthma. Those figures are well known.

EV: How was that knowledge applied in your preparations in the short time you had to get ready for this event?

KM: I was in communication with people in New Orleans . . . about what was happening . . . How many people are evacuating? . . . What kinds of patients are they seeing? . . . They were seeing dehydration . . . people who had lost their prescriptions. They weren't seeing many injuries. They didn't have any broken bones, but they had hypertension, diabetes, asthma, need for dialysis. . . .

Then, at 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the 31st of August, I received a phone call that asked me to be ready for a conference call. . . . Our objective was to take care of the health needs of these people. . . . We constructed, in the next twelve hours, five different levels of care that we were going to provide. . . . We had about 200 items we addressed very, very quickly. . . .

We looked at each other, and we said, "We know each other. We are not going to accept 'I can't do it' as an answer while we are working on this. . . . We are going to achieve this operation, and we are going to achieve it quickly, and accurately, and with great expertise. And if you can't do that, get out of the room, we will replace you with somebody else." . . .

I have the ability to cut through a lot of red tape, and if I need pediatricians, geriatricians, [or] dialysis, I am able to request for volunteers to those organizations and get them almost instantaneously. . . . There was a DMAT [Disaster Medical Assistance Team] cache in Galveston. Cache is a storage place; two caches with pharmacy stores for just this kind of activity. I said, "I want one of those caches here. I want to keep one down there in case there was a hurricane at Galveston two weeks later." . . . That cache was never released . . . because of some government quirk in the law. [Houston] had not been declared a disaster area, so they couldn't release the cache. We came over to Ben Taub, and we raided our pharmacy so we could open the clinic. Meanwhile, we called CVS and said, "Do you have an eighteen-wheeler that you have a bunch of drugs on that you can have out there in the morning?"

[They said,] "Yes," [and] we were able to replete our drugs. . . . We decided very quickly we would have no pharmacy except for over-the-counter medicines in the Astrodome itself, and we would tightly control all medical care within the Arena. . . .

We began that first day to encounter federal barriers because of red tape, regulations, and silos of thinking. Our job was to cut through those. . . . We knew the first thing we were going to encounter were sick people that needed to go to the hospital because they hadn't been dialyzed for five days. We knew that people had lost their pills, and we needed some way to identify what they had been on and to refill their prescriptions. . . .

We postulated that in four days, we were going to have a diarrhea epidemic, we were going to have maybe a pneumonia epidemic from colds, and maybe we were going to see increases in mental health problems. . . . We set in place a surveillance mechanism to pick things up, and then . . . keep it from spreading.



CVS was able to fill the void for medications when the cache of medicine and supplies in Galveston could not be released due to red tape. Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.

We knew we had over 200 voluntary agencies, . . . so we formed this thirty member Joint Unified Command . . . [that] met every eight hours around the clock . . .

Dr. Maddox was very good at doing, at the end of the day, a little “Mattox Minute” . . . basically, [a] caution that we needed to tend to ourselves. While I think we all understood that intellectually, nobody really had time to address those issues, and the Unified Command did an outstanding job of really trying to preserve morale. Part of it was just the privilege.

Dr. Herminia Palacio, Executive Director, Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services.

EV: How did you all credential folks?

KM: The first twenty-four hours, anyone who is a member of

Massive amounts of shoes and clothing were donated to the relief effort and then sorted by volunteers by gender and size. Upon arrival, this was the first stop for evacuees who did not need medical attention. Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.



the Harris County Medical Society was automatically credentialed. . . . [We] took our credentialing people from this hospital and set up an office over there. We had about 4,000 physicians who volunteered . . . There were 200 . . . that we could never credential . . . We were protecting this innocent public, and we were one of the very few disasters . . . in [this] country that has done that. . . .

I usually had a pedometer with me to check how many steps I took [at Reliant]. That first day, I think I walked 16,000 steps in twenty-four hours . . . about eight to nine miles.

Dr. Carlos Valbona, Medical Director of Community Health Centers, Harris County Hospital District.

EV: How was the mental health of these folks?

KM: Probably twenty-five percent of the people of the population that we received already had mental health problems before Katrina . . . Four individuals who were part of the medical group were mental health [professionals] . . .

We created an atmosphere of hope over despair. . . . We had background noise and music in the Astrodome. We created a mechanism of signage where they could look for their relatives. We created an atmosphere of religion. . . . From the moment the buses rolled into the Reliant Park, we wanted to start on changing that despair. We had a medic, a nurse, a nurse practitioner, and in some cases, a doctor who would walk on every bus and would hand them a . . . registration [form], . . . a bottle of water, [and] a sanitation kit that contained soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, a razor, and shaving cream. . . . They said, “We want you to exit the bus, and if you are really bad sick, we’re going to the hospital. If you . . . need a prescription refill, we will do that four hours from now or in the morning. What we want you to do is go to this room where there are piles of clothes that were donated, . . . pick you out some new clean clothes, shoes, and underwear.”

One of the things we barked in the morning was we want 400 showers. How they got there, I don’t know, but they were there.

New piping was brought in; new drainage was brought in. “We want you to go take a shower, throw your old clothes away, put on your new clothes, and go to this location where there is a hot meal. [Then], . . . go to the floor of the Astrodome, and there is a cot and a blanket, and go to sleep.” That in and of itself is giving these people hope. . . . Initially as they got off the bus, they would hoard the food. By thirty-six hours, they stopped hoarding the food because they knew we were going to keep the food rolling and the water running. . . .



The City of Houston successfully installed showers, washing machines, and sinks in order to ensure sanitation in the shelters.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

From a historic perspective, what Houston did to come together in an integrated, collaborative network, to work together to rescue a community that was in despair was absolutely incredible, and I don’t think [it] could have happened in any other community in the United States. It was partly brought about by the attitude of the mayor, and the county judge, and this unified command; for we had an expectation of treating people with dignity. . . . We wanted to show them [our “guest citizens”] and the community our respect. We did not lock them in. This was not a prison; this was a shelter. This was a conduit for them to become productive members of society, and we tried to communicate that to them. The [Houston] community did that together, and there were over 60,000 volunteers that participated in that.

David Lopez: “Working in public health . . . feeds your soul”

David Lopez is the president and chief operating officer for the Harris County Hospital District. The county’s public health care system provides many services including over one million patient visits annually. The district operates Ben Taub, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Quentin Mease Hospitals, fourteen community health care centers, nine school-based clinics, as well as homeless shelters and mobile health care units. The county primarily coordinated the medical facilities set up at the Astrodome during Katrina. Lopez was interviewed at his office by Ernesto Valdés on January 27, 2010.

ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV): What did you do when you heard that people were evacuating to Houston?

DAVID LOPEZ (DL): I contacted my staff, “We are going into disaster mode.” (Not internal disaster but external disaster; internal disaster if it happens inside the hospital.)

We worked with both UT and Baylor; UT was staffing the George R. Brown, Baylor was staffing, . . . the Katrina facility we set up [at the Astrodome.] . . . It was basically a large MASH unit. . . . We had portable x-rays, we had laboratory people there, . . . we had whatever we needed. It was really an awesome thing to see. . . .

EV: Did Tropical Storm Allison prepare you for Katrina?

DL: Absolutely . . . What we learned from Allison is that we can improvise, and in working as a team, we can work together in a positive environment. . . . When Katrina hit, we had learned from that experience. . . . Regardless of what you face, . . . you take it, you address it, you analyze it, and you figure out a plan . . . Once you develop a template for what works, then you use it. When we had the hurricane [Ike], we set up a command center, and whatever we had learned from Allison and Katrina,



The Katrina facility that was set up at the Astrodome was basically a large MASH unit. Portable X-rays, labs, and basic medical equipment such as blood pressure machines were all on site.

Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.

in our drills, we handled extremely well. . . .

The first bus that showed up [from New Orleans] was so unexpected. We were told we were going to get the first bus the next morning, but a bus showed up all by itself eight hours ahead of time . . . So you have to improvise and say, “Alright, we’ve got to take care of them . . .” We got a handle on it, and we were managing it as opposed to reacting. That is a stage you want to get to. . . .

EV: What were some of the public health issues that you faced?

DL: As people were getting out of the buses, some didn’t make it; so you had to remove them with dignity.

EV: People passed away on the buses?

DL: Yes.

EV: Oh my.

DL: We never talked about those things, but you had to remove them out of the buses with dignity. That became important. . . .

We had, the first night, a lot of the people on the bus who hadn’t had their methadone treatments. . . . They were kind of hyper. . . . We actually called the HPD, and we said, “. . . We want the biggest, burliest police officers you’ve got, and we are going to form a barrier between them and our staff to have security in a nice, professional cordial way.” They showed up, and they formed a line . . . and said, “Stay back. They will get to you, wait your turn.” To their credit, people would wait their turn. . . .

[Around] two o’clock in the morning, I had . . . close to 2,000 . . . waiting to be seen by a physician. . . . I told [David Lopez], . . . “The physicians are almost idle because we have to register these people . . . may I go ahead and see the patients, and . . . get [the] registration [afterwards]?” He said, “Do whatever you have to do.”

Dr. Carlos Valbona, Medical Director of
Community Health Centers, Harris County Hospital District.

One particular day, we had a patient, a kid who had something contagious, . . . and Dr. Palacio wanted him quarantined. The kid wanted to get back to his family, so he ran and tried to run back to the Astrodome. . . . I have a vision of Dr. Palacio running after him trying to chase him down, and she can move!

Approximately thirty workstations were set up to check in individuals seeking medical attention.

Photo courtesy of David Lopez.



In order to stop the spread of diarrhea and infections, fifteen sinks were installed with great improvisation—something characteristic of Houston’s overall response.
Photo courtesy of David Lopez.

. . . We eventually found him. We didn’t want him infecting the rest of the population because if you have diarrhea affecting 20,000 people at the same time, that’s not good. . . .

People would say, “I have this problem; we have to worry about infection.” . . . This guy [replied], “We can set up ten, fifteen sinks here.” [But] we can’t touch the ceiling . . . [So] our maintenance guys . . . set up a whole string of sinks, fifteen sinks, with PVC pipe [and] faucets where you turn them on with your knees. I was so proud of my staff because they improvised, and they were coming up with great solutions. . . .

We said [to a government man], “Go find us bathrooms. . . . Do whatever you’ve got to do.” He got us fifteen bathrooms that we needed . . . portable potties. Everybody wants to participate and do whatever they can. In that kind of environment you don’t get, “That’s not my job.” . . . It is like when you have a football team. If the head back fumbles, the lineman isn’t going to say, “It’s not my job to carry the ball.” Everybody jumps at the ball. . . .

When you get involved in public health, public health is intoxicating, and it is also very addictive. Because working in public health like that, it feeds your soul. . . .

EV: Someone told me, “I never wanted to go home, and when I did, I couldn’t wait to get back.”

DL: I had to literally chase people home. They didn’t want to leave. You get hooked on adrenalin and endorphins. When you are doing something for others . . . it is ministry work. . . . You don’t worry about how much money you are getting paid; you don’t worry about the overtime. You know what you do? More people need help, and I’ve got to take care of them.

We thought we were going to have to keep it [the Astrodome clinic] open for at least a month, . . . but after we got everybody stabilized and took care of the basics, then we figured, at some point, we had to call it a day. It was really kind of sad. . . . We responded to a huge need, and we had provided outstanding patient care. . . . The ones who made it to the Superdome were

people who couldn't leave for whatever reason. They were the disenfranchised, the poor people. A lot of these patients had never seen a doctor before. . . . It provided us an opportunity to be of service to them in a very positive way. It was kind of bittersweet. . . . We decided we wanted to finish on a high note. . . . So, the last day we were there, free ice cream for everybody. If you participated, a volunteer, or did anything, then we gave everybody shirts, "I was a Katrina Volunteer."

Dr. David Persse: "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you."

Dr. David Persse has served as the Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Houston since 1996. In May 2004, the City Council appointed him Houston's Public Health Authority. In this role, he is responsible for the medical aspects of clinical care quality management, disease control, and public health preparedness. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the South East Texas Trauma Regional Advisory Council and the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. The City of Houston primarily coordinated medical care provided at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Dr. Persse was interviewed by Ernesto Valdés on August 2, 2006.

ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV): How did you find out you would be working on the Katrina relief effort?

DAVID PERSSE (DP): I got a call around five o'clock in the morning from Dr. Herminia Palacio who is the Harris County Public Health officer. . . . Looking back, it was laughable what we thought we were going to need. . . . Fifty wheelchairs and a hundred stretchers, three security guards, one-half dozen ambulances, or whatever. Those numbers aren't exact, but it was something on that scale. . . . We wound up needing 500 wheelchairs and 200 ambulances. . . . We thought we were only going to get the people from the [Super]dome in New Orleans and they [would] come in a very orderly fashion to the [Astro]dome. . . .

Some time around ten or eleven o'clock Tuesday night, the first bus showed up. It was driven by someone who wasn't a



Dr. David Persse (center), Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Houston, coordinated medical care at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

bus driver. Some young twenty or twenty-two-year-old fellow, . . . got in the bus, and he loaded every poor soul he could find onto that bus to help them out and drove them to Houston. That was the beginning, and that night, the buses trickled in. None of them were from the [Super]dome. . . . The next morning, the rate quickened. The Houston Fire Department . . . got a call to 9-1-1 from the Astrodome. It was a report of a sick person. When the fire truck and the ambulance responded over there, and the captain on the engine company arrived on the scene, there were quite a number of buses. He realized that this was quickly developing into something. . . . Captain Trevino, who is now our assistant chief over at EMS, showed up, and he immediately declared a mass casualty event . . .

When I went over to the [Astro]dome for the first couple of days, one of the experiences that tickled me forever is that the buses were lined up . . . where people would disembark. The process was that a paramedic . . . would board the bus and [say,] . . . "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you. . . . For those of you who are in need of immediate medical attention, please remain on the bus. We are going to get everyone off who can get off and get you into the Dome. There is water out here. There are toilets out here. You will then get processed, and we will get you inside the Dome. . . ." Then, a police officer would get on the bus, and he would say, "Before you are going to be allowed in the Dome, everybody needs to understand you will not be allowed in with any drugs, weapons, or alcohol."

"Medical Branch was responsible for essentially setting up a public health department for a city that went from a population of 0 to 27,000 in two days."

Dr. Herminia Palacio, Executive Director,
Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services.

My experience, standing up at the front of the bus, . . . was that as the fire fighters said, "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you," the looks on the people's faces changed a little bit. . . . They almost went from awestruck with a little bit of anticipation to a little bit of relief. . . . When the police officer said, "You won't be allowed in with any drugs, weapons, or alcohol." People immediately presented drugs, weapons, and alcohol. . . . To see someone just hand over a handgun . . . just, here, take my handgun, just get me off this bus. I think that is a pretty loud statement of how anxious they were to get off the bus. Then, these people would file off the bus.

You have to understand, . . . they have been sweating, . . . the bus reeked because some of the buses had toilets and bathrooms on them that had all overflowed. The school buses, of course, didn't have that, and they didn't have air-conditioning either. The smell of just the human element—very strong smell. People looked completely exhausted. Emotionally devastated was the look on their faces. There were elder folks that looked very frail, and you wonder how they ever made it this far, they look so weak. Women with children and babies. Young, strong, men—gang member types—who look exhausted. Every slice of life, every strata of the community was on there. . . .

EV: What was your life like day-to-day?

DP: I woke up at 6:00 a.m. Sometimes I slept at the George R.



Elderly evacuees were cared for in a hanger at Ellington Air Force base that they shared with a NASA plane.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

Brown. Sometimes I slept at the Houston Emergency Center, emergency operation center. I think I went for three weeks without sleeping at home. . . . We set up a lot of processes to solve problems and then . . . we ran into the outbreak of Norovirus that occurred in the Dome and Reliant Center. Norovirus has become famous on cruise ships—nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. You put a lot of people together in tight quarters like that, it is an extremely contagious virus. . . . We had to quickly react . . .

General George Patton was absolutely right when he said, “The plan is nothing. The planning is everything.” . . . We put together these plans, and you’d drill on them, and you’d try to think things through. The problem is the disaster never reads the plan, so it never matches. . . . Your plan then becomes like a tool box with a variety of different tools in it, and you need to know it well enough that you can reach in and pull out the right tool, and use it the right way, to solve whatever problem you are faced with. . . . But if you don’t plan, you don’t get to know your tool box. . . .

EV: When did the planes start landing at Ellington Air Force Base?

DP: It was Wednesday evening . . . We would get a report that the planes were going to start arriving at 5:30 p.m. The local and EMS representative organization, the DeBakey VA Medical Center, [went] out there . . . 5:30 comes and goes, 6:30 comes and goes, 7:30 comes and goes, and there are no planes. We have got all these ambulances lined up, we’ve got doctors and nurses that were waiting. My phone rings . . . “Dr. Persse, this is Joe Smith of the Ellington air traffic control tower. There is a C130 inbound from New Orleans. I have no idea how many patients are on board, but they are landing in twenty minutes.” . . . A crew member would get off, and they would basically have a Big

Chief tablet of paper and handwritten on there was, “No. 1, Bob Smith; No. 2, Betty Smith; No. 3, . . .” and that was our manifest. It was pencil and paper. . . .

EV: Is it a surprise that there were no major injuries or illnesses because of the flood?

DP: Not really. People think that if you are walking through all that dirty water, that you are going to get sick. The reality is that you are at risk for contracting, certainly, tetanus, but we also worry about things like hepatitis. . . . But we did not see a big outbreak in hepatitis. I don’t know that we saw anybody with tetanus. . . . What we did see later on over the ensuing three months was the rate of sudden death in Houston jumped by over twenty-five percent. Our population went up by about ten percent, but the number of CPR cases per day went up by twenty-five percent. . . . We didn’t have a good way of saying that it was 100% folks from New Orleans, but that is the assumption. . . .

EV: What would you tell Houston right now?

DP: I think that Houston is better prepared for disasters of pretty much any kind—whether it is terrorists, otherwise man made, or natural, than most other metropolitan areas in the nation. Not because we are any smarter, or we’ve got any more dollars spent here, but because the people that are in decision-making positions here are probably more experienced than most other cities—New York City being an exception; Los Angeles maybe being another exception with all the ground fires and earthquakes. . . . Between Allison, Katrina, and Rita, your public health, your emergency services people here in the Houston area have a lot of experience, and experience is probably the best teacher.

Diana Rodriguez: Emergency Care with a Photographer's Vision

Diana Rodriguez is the Administrative Coordinator to Dr. David Persse, the Director of the Houston Fire Department Emergency Medical Services. She is a trained EMT and has won a national award from the National Association of EMS Physicians for one of her EMS photographs. She observed the emotions that pervaded the various sites she visited both as a professional and a photographer. Ms. Rodriguez was interviewed at her office by Ernesto Valdés on August 16, 2006.

ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV): What were you doing when you heard that you would be doing something for Katrina relief?

DIANA RODRIGUEZ (DR): It was August 31, and that morning, Dr. Persse called me and said, "Get ready. When I swing by the office, I need to pick you up." We had done something very similar during Tropical Storm Allison when the hospital got set up over at Reliant Center. . . . During Allison we basically operated out of his car, and I had my box of index cards, my phone book—we were mobile nomads putting out spot fires and making sure things were running smoothly. . . . Dr. Persse told me, "We're going to be doing the same thing." I knew I was going to be very busy, and everything was going to be spontaneous. . . .

EV: Was your first assignment to meet the planes at Ellington Air Force Base?

DR: Yes. . . . We didn't know what to expect. . . . You only know what you've seen on TV at that point. . . . You are at Ellington. There is this big NASA plane in the background. . . . You are in a plane hangar, and you've got this little lady that is frail and that is getting attended to. It was just such a contrast of things and really, we didn't know what else was going to happen. Were there any more storms coming? Are we (Houston) going to get hit?

EV: When did you start snapping pictures of all this?

DR: Immediately . . . it was a given—I knew I had to have my camera. . . .

I asked this lady [at Reliant if I could take a picture of her



A woman carried her niece's baby all the way from New Orleans after the family got separated.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

baby] because I was trying to be considerate. . . . They had just gotten off a bus, and it was hot. She said, "Yes," and she held it up for me, and she smiled. I said, "Oh, thank you. . . . It is a precious little baby." She finally said, "It's not my baby. . . . It's my niece's baby." I said, "Oh, O.K. Where is the mom?" Oh my God, that opened up the flood gates, and she said, "Well, I think she is here at the Astrodome, and we are going to try to find her." I said, "Well, we are about to . . . send you to the George R. Brown; so, don't go anywhere." . . . We got one of those little short Metro buses . . . to send them right down the street to the Astrodome. She said, "We got separated when the waters kept coming up . . . She hasn't seen the baby in two to three days." I would just be crazy if I was separated from my baby.

EV: So, did she finally find them?

DR: All I know is I put them on the bus. I've got a picture of them—they are on the bus, they are happy, and they are going to hopefully get reunited. I don't know what happened. That bothers me. I imagine they got reunited. I want to believe they got reunited.

EV: Did you notice a shift in attitude, a click from despair to hope?

DR: I think once we saw the people land, even at Ellington, it was, O.K., they're here—we can take care of them. . . .

As far as for the people that were coming in, I think they were just so relieved to get here and get off a bus when they had been on it for hours. I am thinking that that was their sense of hope. "There is hope. I am landing on the ground now, and it is not flooded. There is no mud. There is food." . . .

I know there were a lot of negative stories in the media. Most of these people were full of gratitude. Some even managed to smile. People would say to me, "Oh my God, you were dealing with those Katrina people. . . ." I never experienced anything negative—short of my flash went off one time when we were at the Dome, and one guy got really visibly upset . . . I kept running into people that if they knew you were with the fire department, . . . they would say, "Oh, thank you. Ya'll are so wonderful." . . . I felt like I didn't even do anything compared to some of our firefighters. 🌸



Just before being taken to the George R. Brown, this family was moved to a special bus and taken to the Astrodome in hopes of being reunited with the baby's mother who they believed was there.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.