

# Disaster Preparedness for Mothers & Babies:

## Getting Prepared



by **Katherine Camacho Carr, CNM, PhD, FACNM**  
President

**D**uring the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Robbie Prepas, CNM, ACNM member from California, delivered five babies in the New Orleans Airport and twins in an ambulance en route to Baton Rouge. She triaged several hundred pregnant moms by listening to their fetal heartbeats and providing antenatal and postpartum care.

"I have worked in disaster situations all over the world, and Hurricane Katrina was the worst I have ever been involved in. There were no policies or procedures in place to care for pregnant women or mothers and their babies after Katrina. We even lacked such basics as diapers, formula, baby bottles and clean clothes," said Prepas, who is a member of the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood.

At the ACNM Annual Meeting, a motion was made to establish an Ad Hoc Committee for Disaster Preparedness within the American College of Nurse-Midwives. There was unanimous support from the membership present and also from the ACNM Board of Directors. Prepas will chair this important ad hoc committee. The Ad Hoc Disaster Preparedness Committee will formulate guidelines and recommend policies to the Board of Directors related to our preparation for future natural or man-made disasters such as pandemic influenza, hurricanes, earthquakes or terrorist events. The committee will also work with other groups and organizations to assure that our efforts are collaborative.

### Why is this important?

The world is a dangerous place and we have much evidence to suggest that there is lack of care for women, infants and families when disaster strikes. Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath are examples of the lack of care and failure to prepare or organize care for pregnant and delivering women and their newborns. Individual

midwives were there, but there was no coordinated, planned effort to care for pregnant or birthing women. We must advocate for women and infants so that outcomes during and after disasters will improve. ACNM should participate in the national agenda to shape the planning and policy related to the care of women and infants in any disaster. ACNM members will also benefit with guidelines for organizing their own communities to respond in these situations, as well as collaborate with other care providers.

A National Working Group on Women and Infant Needs in Emergencies has been convened through the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) to address the issue of how federal, state and local governments, as well as non-governmental agencies, care providers of all types and their organizations, should prepare for the special needs of pregnant and birthing women, new mothers and infants during a disaster. The mission of the National Working Group for Women and Infant Needs in Emergencies is to ensure that the health care needs of pregnant women, new mothers, fragile newborns, and infants are adequately met during and after a disaster situation. ACNM is one of several organizations participating in the National Working Group, which includes ACOG and the March of Dimes. One of the first tasks of the National Working Group is to prepare a guidance document for emergency preparedness planners at the state and federal levels and a service package or kit for responders to use in the field during a disaster. Member organizations will use their expertise and resources to create awareness of the needs of women and infants in an emergency and advocate for policies that improve outcomes for mothers and infants affected by disaster. For more information, visit [www.whiteribbonalliance.org](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org). ACNM staff and Ad Hoc Disaster Preparedness Committee mem-

bers are involved in the National Working Group.

The Joint Commission Resources, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration and the American Red Cross will host the second annual emergency preparedness conference, Disaster Readiness on the Home Front, from October 19-20, 2006 in Washington, DC. Conference participants will examine the threat of natural disasters and pandemic flu and help with the formulation of a response plan during a disaster. To find out more about the conference or to register visit [www.jcrinc.com/education.asp?durki=11641](http://www.jcrinc.com/education.asp?durki=11641).

We will need a system in place to care for mothers and babies, adequate shelter plans, and training for emergency first responders in the appropriate care of mothers and newborns, among other things. Midwives are important care providers when disaster strikes. We have to start preparing for disasters and there is still a lot of planning ahead. If you are interested in serving on the Ad Hoc Committee for Disaster Preparedness, please contact Robbie Prepas at [rprepas@yahoo.com](mailto:rprepas@yahoo.com).

### Resources

Shaver, T., Oleck, A. (2006). *Helping moms, babies when disaster strikes*. The Baltimore Sun, May 14, 2006. **Q**

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**Members are welcome to attend any open session of a Board of Directors meeting.**

### 2006 Meetings:

December 1-3, Washington, DC area