

Never Alone

Hurricane Helene, Hurricane Milton
and the HCA Healthcare Response



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Hurricane Milton and
the HCA Healthcare
Response

On the cover:

When disaster strikes, we show up.
Colleagues from all over the United States traveled at a moment's notice to relieve care teams and support leadership at facilities impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

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Dedication: This publication exists to honor the sacrifices made by our colleagues to care for and improve human life before, during and after Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.



Dear Colleagues,

Over my 42 years with the company, I have seen our colleagues show up in moments of crisis like only HCA Healthcare can. In October 2024, when five of our divisions, including over 50 hospitals, experienced the effects of two major hurricanes in the span of two weeks, it was no different. The response efforts of our colleagues in our facilities, divisions, and corporate offices have been nothing short of extraordinary.

Our teams across North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida were well-prepared for these storms. Unfortunately, the community impact was profound. Hurricanes Helene and Milton brought overwhelming floods, left millions without power and water, and tragically resulted in loss of life, including members of our own HCA Healthcare family. Many are still dealing with the aftereffects.

Throughout it all, the unwavering dedication, remarkable bravery, and outstanding leadership demonstrated by so many people in our company have been the utmost example of our mission. The unique capabilities of this organization coupled with the mindset of our people to do the right thing for our communities have ensured continued operations and, most importantly, uninterrupted patient care for the people who depend on us.

We know that many of our colleagues have been personally affected by these storms. In response, our HCA Healthcare Hope Fund has fulfilled more than 3,300 grant requests between Hurricanes Helene and Milton, totaling more than \$2.8 million to date. In addition, mini marts, mobile showers, gasoline trucks, and more were all deployed to ensure our people had access to food, water, and other necessities.

This special publication is an opportunity to honor the incredible work that has taken place across our organization before, during, and after the hurricanes.

Your remarkable courage and resilience have been a privilege to observe. I am humbled by your compassion and solidarity during such heartbreaking times. Thank you. You make me proud to be a part of the HCA Healthcare family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sam", written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sam Hazen
CEO, HCA Healthcare

Prologue

Before the rain even began, we were watching the skies.

Teams across HCA Healthcare had been tracking the movements of a dangerous tropical cyclone that was fast approaching the Southeastern United States. While wind speeds began to grow and torrential rain started to fall, we were already on the move.

More than one-third of HCA Healthcare's facilities and colleagues were in the projected path of the storm. The activation of emergency operations meant that critical patients were in the process of being relocated out of flood zones. While a handful of hospitals were being evacuated, teams at other facilities were instructed to shelter in place to care for patients as the storm passed.

When Hurricane Helene made landfall as a Category 4 storm, it did so with a fury that tore buildings apart and turned streets into rivers. Communities were left in disbelief at the destruction.

Less than two weeks later, Hurricane Milton struck Florida's west coast as a Category 3. Roofs were ripped from buildings like paper, trees were uprooted and floods began to rise.

In the chaos that followed, HCA Healthcare resources, including Incident Response Teams, were deployed across Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. Entire neighborhoods had been cut off from the outside world, city grids were down and lives turned upside down. After all was said and done, Hurricane Helene would go on record as the deadliest storm to strike the mainland U.S. since Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

HCA Healthcare is no stranger to challenges. Our unyielding commitment to the people we serve has kept us going through some of the most difficult national and global disasters. As Helene and Milton raged across five of our divisions, our response was swift, focused and unprecedented. Throughout power outages, destructive winds and deadly flooding, HCA Healthcare provided uninterrupted care by any means necessary with courage and ingenuity.

In the midst of a disaster, hospitals become more than sites of care. They are beacons of hope. For many of our facilities, the storms left roads impassable and supply chains in jeopardy. Undeterred, our local teams used the resources provided by HCA Healthcare and partnered with local officials, first responders and other partner organizations to meet the needs of all who came in search of help.

It wasn't easy and there were challenges, but our people did not falter. Colleagues in our facilities, divisions and corporate offices worked around the clock to stretch every resource and make sure that no one was left without care. Local caregivers packed bags and left on foot to reach HCA Healthcare facilities where they could lend a hand. More than 1,200 colleagues slept at their HCA Healthcare facilities in the first days of the storm. Others from across the country raised their hands and volunteered to travel from far and wide to hard-hit areas where they could relieve the burden.

Our people are the heroes who showed up, and are showing up still. The best of humanity shone through as they held the hands of those in need, and held on to each other with resilience and compassion. We continue to pick up the pieces even now.

This is the story of HCA Healthcare's response to two consecutive natural disasters unlike any we had seen. This is the story of how our network of colleagues faced something great with a fortitude that was even greater. This is a story of strength, sacrifice, and the unwavering ability to persevere when you know you are never alone.



Chapter 1

Preparing for Response

HCA Healthcare's repository of colleague expertise, valuable partnerships, access to resources and proven track record of responding to disasters ensures continuity of patient care, even in unprecedented times.



Before Hurricanes Helene and Milton made landfall, emergency operations teams across the enterprise were gathering to prepare their facilities and their people for what was to come.

Katrina. Harvey. Beryl. Ian. These unforgettable names are infamous in hurricane history for the magnitude of their aftermath. In 2024, Hurricanes Helene and Milton joined this list.

Hurricane Helene, which impacted Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia as a Category 4 storm, is the second deadliest hurricane — behind Katrina in 2005 —to make landfall this century in the continental U.S.. In western North Carolina, catastrophic flooding from Helene wiped out entire communities, destroyed the infrastructure of multiple towns and caused more than 200 deaths. Two weeks later, Milton struck Florida as a Category 3 storm that spawned roughly four dozen tornadoes throughout the state and caused massive flooding in central and west Florida.

Throughout both disasters, HCA Healthcare stood ready with the resources needed to provide uninterrupted patient care, and to support our colleagues and communities. Our national network of resources, including colleagues, supplies, vendor relationships and more, allowed us to respond immediately in a way that only HCA Healthcare can. Our scale sets us apart, and the skill and dedication of our people makes our crisis response possible.

“We are incredibly fortunate to be part of HCA Healthcare, where there is no shortage of sister facilities for us to partner with for guidance and best practices.

-Greg Lowe, President, North Carolina Division

Preparing for the unpredictable

Before Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida on Sept. 26 with record-breaking surges, HCA Healthcare’s Enterprise Emergency Operations Center (EEOC) in Nashville, Tenn. had been monitoring the storm as it gained strength in the Caribbean. Our West and North Florida divisions began de-risking critical patients, evacuating hospitals and preparing facilities to shelter in place by Sept. 23. Incident Response Teams were deployed to Florida the very next day. Meanwhile, Garima K. Stack, South Atlantic Division vice president of Quality & Patient Safety, Dr. B. Patrice Vance, West Florida Division vice president of Clinical Operations and Quality and senior leadership at Mission Health were leading emergency response operations across their respective divisions.

HCA Healthcare’s EEOC introduced Incident Response Teams in 2020. Today, hundreds of members across HCA Healthcare are trained annually on how to effectively respond to events impacting patient care or colleague wellness. All team members are part of the Enterprise Emergency Operations Program, made up of corporate, division and hospital-based clinicians, leaders and executives from numerous states across our organization who are cross-trained as incident response personnel during events such as hurricanes.


When disasters escalate, our priority is first and foremost the safety of patients and colleagues.

A secure infrastructure plays a key role in ensuring the safety of those involved. A 6,500 square-foot flood control barrier was deployed at HCA Florida Pasadena Hospital. While generators and fuel trucks were delivered, colleagues and first responders began to arrive at facilities across Florida and Georgia.

In the days leading up to Helene’s arrival, the EEOC began paying close attention to North Carolina as well. Nearly three months’ worth of precipitation fell across the western North Carolina mountains over just three days. HCA Healthcare’s weather contractor, StormGeo, which provides weather forecasts, alerts, and other services to guide decision-making, indicated the potential for massive flooding in the area.



As Hurricane Milton moved across Florida, Georgia and into North Carolina, our emergency operations teams kept a close eye on the storm’s impact on HCA Healthcare facilities to ensure critical resources could be quickly deployed to support our patients and colleagues.



At HCA Florida Pasadena Hospital, flood control barriers were established around the facility before the storm even began, ensuring rising waters were kept from critical areas of the hospital.

In preparation, detailed hurricane and flooding playbooks were distributed to HCA Healthcare facilities in and around western North Carolina, and an Incident Response Team was deployed in preparation for what might be in store.

“We are incredibly fortunate to be part of HCA Healthcare, where there is no shortage of sister facilities for us to partner with for guidance and best practices,” says Greg Lowe, president of HCA Healthcare North Carolina Division, which includes Mission Health in Asheville.

It soon became clear that Helene was going to leave an unprecedented impact. More than 20 subsequent tornadoes were reported across five states, four million people were left without power and nearly 230 fatalities were reported. An excess of 12 inches of rain fell in Augusta, Georgia and more than two feet of rain deluged western North Carolina, where homes, automobiles and people were swept away in floods, mudslides and landslides. Much of the damage from Helene occurred in areas that rarely experience storms of that magnitude and, therefore, didn’t have the experience or response mechanisms at the ready to respond.

In addition to power outages, Helene also destroyed cellphone towers, leaving families unable to communicate with loved ones or even call for help. Floodwaters burst through pipes and pump stations, causing catastrophic damage to a major reservoir. Extensive damage to water systems left more than 100,000 people without potable water for weeks, and even into November.

Michael Wargo, vice president of Enterprise Emergency Operations, explained how an advanced level of planning is required when a community’s water and communication systems are threatened.

“When you think about the loss of those utilities and the cascading (effects) that it had, I don’t know that any of us anticipated the broad impact to the community,” Michael says. “From an internal perspective, we had all the T’s crossed and I’s dotted from a preparedness standpoint. But when you have a complete wipeout of a community water system, never did any of us think that we would be trucking in 30-plus tanker trucks per day just to support the hospital system.”

Mission Hospital in particular became a critical area of focus, as any disruption of services would be a major disruption to the entire region. Mission Hospital, which serves 18 of the 27 western North Carolina counties touched by Helene, became a beacon of hope in the community. Residents from across the region gravitated to Mission Hospital, even if they had no need for medical attention, because they knew they could find food, potable water and a Wi-Fi signal to reach loved ones.

“

They are this magical team – you give them any task, they have the right skill set and they figure it out.

-Michael Wargo, Vice President, Enterprise Emergency Operations

To maintain hospital operations, HCA Healthcare deployed:

- Tanker trucks to provide water
- Engineers from HCA Healthcare facilities across the country to develop innovative solutions including new wells, to allow access to water
- Portable showers and laundry units for colleagues without access to water
- Generators and tanker trucks for hotels throughout Asheville where colleagues and their families stayed while supporting Mission Health or while displaced during the storm

These efforts were made possible through established relationships, partnerships and our HealthTrust line of business.

“The amazing part of this is that we have the contracts, the plans, the relationships to be able to do this and that’s the Herculean effort that every person involved in our storm preparation and response activity plays a pivotal role in,” Michael says. “When you look at our supply chain and the depth of resources we have, that’s really a major component of our success.”

Building a team of the very best

Incident Response Team members represent trained staff across all 15 divisions. The EEOC solicits applicants annually. Applicants are identified by their division EOCs or through interactions with current Incident Response Team members during deployments or through preparedness activities throughout the year. Applicants are selected for their specific expertise in areas such as plant operations, safety and security, emergency management and behavioral health. A Downtime Response Team of IT and communication experts also manages downtime response. Additionally, a NICU Incident Support Team of nurses, respiratory therapists and flight paramedics assists with NICU patient transport.

Once selected, Incident Response Team members attend an annual in-person weeklong training and participate in virtual readiness meetings throughout the year. They volunteer on deployments, with the support of their supervisors.

Universal approach to disaster planning

In disaster planning, there’s what’s called an 80/20 rule, says Melissa Harvey, assistant vice president of Enterprise Emergency Operations.

“Eighty percent of all disasters are relatively the same. You need to pivot 20 percent for the uniqueness of the situation,” she says.

Whether it’s a cyber, weather, wildfire or mass casualty event, HCA Healthcare created a universal model that’s used across the country. It establishes HCA Healthcare’s principles and mission and provides protocols for life, safety, infrastructure and operations.

In HCA Healthcare’s Enterprise Emergency Operations Center, leaders tuned in to a press conference where Mission Hospital CEO Greg Lowe provided hospital updates to the community after Hurricane Helene impacted western North Carolina.



As the storms approached the coast, local Emergency Operations teams like those at Lake City Hospital in Florida began to gather and prepare

Incident Response Teams: The special forces in healthcare

When an HCA Healthcare facility faces a disaster, its leaders are supported by a team of experts from across the organization. Enterprise Emergency Operations, senior executives and Incident Response Teams all serve alongside one another to assist with preparations, troubleshooting and operations throughout the disaster.

Hospital leadership is on the ground and at the front lines during these events day and night. Having a fresh team ready to step in and assist goes a long way during challenging times.

Incident Response Team members include managers with expertise in plan operations, safety and security, as well as ER nursing to help strategize throughput to meet a community surge.

“I am so grateful for the specialists from our Incident Response Teams and the assistance they have provided to our hospitals since the storm, including the management of our command center,” says Greg Lowe, president of HCA Healthcare North Carolina Division.

Incident Response Teams can give the right assessment and provide the right resources during an emergency. Their value was especially demonstrated in Asheville.

Team members came from across the country, including nurses, engineers, design and construction teams, and supply chain leaders. Engineer and construction team members figured out how to get water from the tanker trucks through the faucets at Mission Hospital.

They display the full spectrum skill sets of colleagues from across the country who are trained to help facilities get through a crisis no matter the challenge — engineering, leadership, supply chain or clinical.

Forty-two Incident Response Teams — a total of 572 colleagues from across the country — were deployed for Helene and Milton. Six teams shifted between Florida and Georgia for Helene, while 15 served in Asheville. Twelve teams went to Florida for Milton and nine supported the Enterprise Emergency Operations Center at corporate headquarters.

Incident Response Teams supported in various ways, including:

- Assisting facility leadership in making critical decisions and organizing their incident management and facility reporting structures
- Assisting with patient evacuations and flood control barrier
- Coordinating cargo helicopter supply missions for outlying hospitals in North Carolina
- Conducting post-storm damage assessments for impacted hospitals, physician practices, urgent care centers and free-standing emergency departments
- Establishing mini-marts and colleague support centers and procuring urgently needed supplies on the ground
- Helping establish a modular, free-standing emergency department at HCA Florida Largo Hospital
- Providing colleagues with behavioral health services and therapy dog visits in North Carolina



The Storm from Start to Finish

Sept. 23

- EEOC activated for Disturbance 35 in the Caribbean, showing signs of strengthening.
- Potential to strengthen into a major hurricane over the next 72 hours.
- West Florida and North Florida Divisions began de-risking critical patients, evacuating hospitals and preparing facilities to shelter-in-place.

Sept. 24

- Tropical Storm Helene formed in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Incident Response Teams deployed to Fla.
- HealthTrust dispatched cots to hospitals housing colleagues overnight.



Sept. 26

- Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida's Big Bend as a powerful Category 4 storm.
- Record-breaking storm surge.
- Incident Response Team deployed to Asheville, N.C.

Sept. 27

- Helene moved north through Ga., N.C. and Tenn., bringing powerful winds and flooding in some communities.
- In Ga., Memorial Satilla Health, Memorial Health Meadows Hospital and Doctors Hospital of Augusta lost access to city water and/or communications.
- Western N.C., the home of Mission Health, was hit especially hard with catastrophic flooding.

Sept. 28 – Oct. 5

- EEOC continued to support Helene response efforts by mobilizing resources to deploy to impacted facilities and assessing the needs of the impacted communities.
- Colleagues in the storm's path showed up and stayed on site to care for patients, even as many could not communicate with their own families.

Oct. 1 – Oct. 3

- HCA Healthcare announced the organization will contribute \$1 million through community organizations to aid in Hurricane Helene relief in N.C.
- HealthTrust and support services delivered portable lights, washers, dryers and other supplies across Georgia, as well as baby formula, pet food, toilets and more to North Carolina.



Oct. 6

- Amid Hurricane Helene support, hospitals also began preparations for Tropical Storm Milton.
- Tropical Storm Milton was expected to make landfall and travel across the Florida peninsula.
- Incident Response Teams deployed to Florida.

Oct. 7

- Milton rapidly intensified to a Category 5 storm with winds at 160 mph.
- Patient de-risking and hospital evacuations began from West Florida Division facilities.

Oct. 9

- Milton made landfall south of Tampa Bay as a Category 3 storm.
- Numerous tornadoes were spawned by Milton in southern and central Fla.

Oct. 10

- In the pre-dawn hours, Hurricane Milton exited Florida.
- HCA Florida Largo Hospital transferred nearly 240 patients due to flooding in the basement that caused a loss of primary and generator power to 75% of the hospital.

Oct. 11

- A modular free-standing emergency department was established at HCA Florida Largo Hospital.

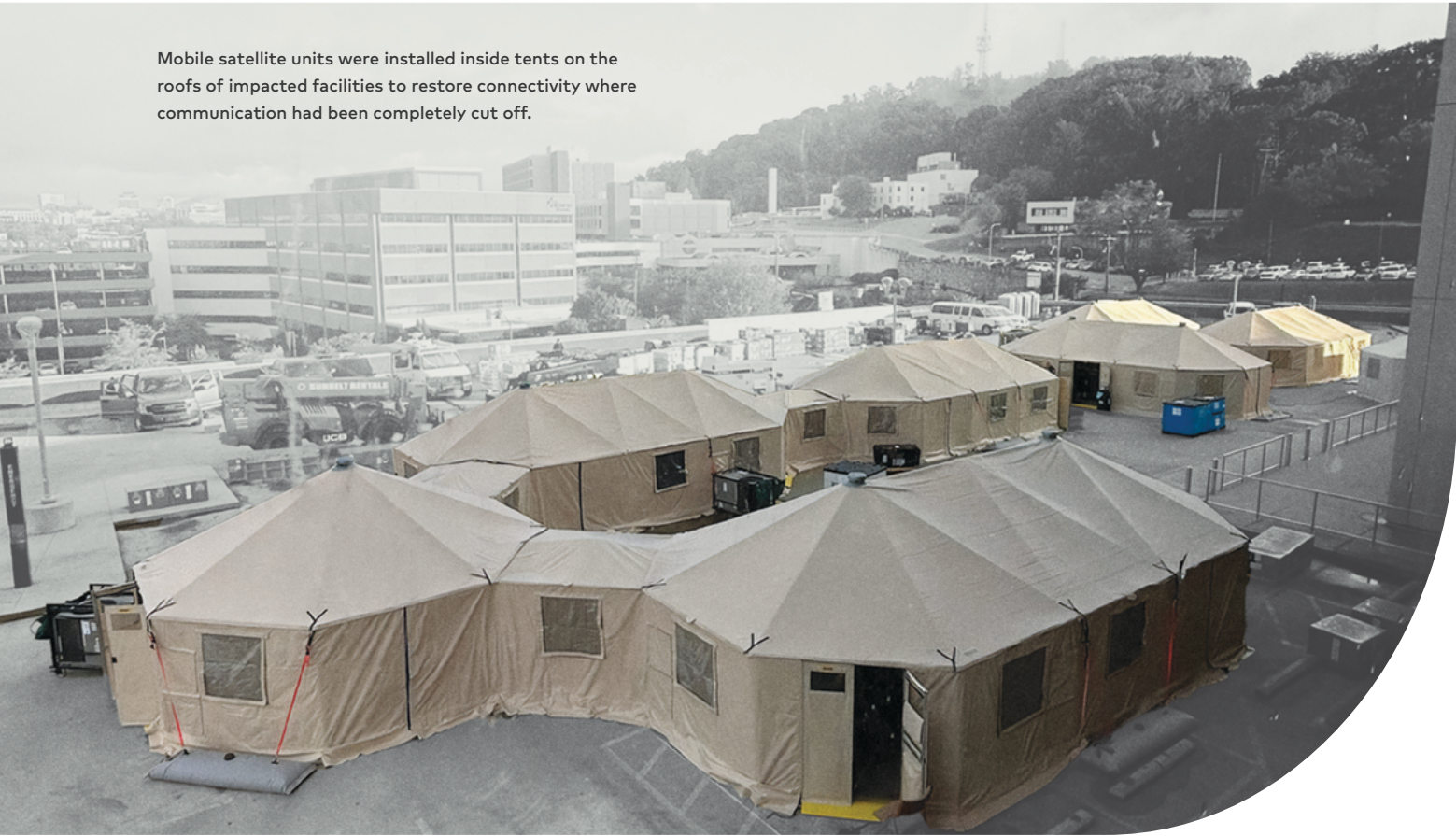
Frontline Point of View

Joe Seely

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Joe Seely emerged as a critical asset for HCA Healthcare, bringing both technical expertise and a spirit of resilience to the disaster response efforts. As a wireless architect with our Information Technology Group (ITG), Joe plays a pivotal role in shaping the standards and technologies that drive HCA Healthcare’s wireless infrastructure across the enterprise.

Joe began his career as an electrician before taking a leap into the tech world and founding a wireless internet service provider in rural Texas. After transitioning to HCA Healthcare in Tennessee in 2014, Joe has spent over a decade honing his skills and contributing to various projects that propel the organization forward. He views his role as a commitment to ensuring that healthcare facilities are equipped with the best possible technology – especially in times of urgent need.

“I help with whatever is needed during disasters,” he explained, emphasizing his dedication to supporting his colleagues and the communities they serve. When Hurricane Helene struck, Joe found himself thrust into the heart of the action. On Friday afternoon, as a historic combination of heavy rainfall, flooding and catastrophic landslides devastated Western North Carolina, Joe was alerted that Mission Health’s main systems were down.



Mobile satellite units were installed inside tents on the roofs of impacted facilities to restore connectivity where communication had been completely cut off.

Although he hadn’t anticipated being directly involved, he received an urgent request the next morning to travel to Asheville, and he immediately hit the ground running. Joe spent the remainder of the day analyzing what would be needed to get Mission’s facilities back online. He utilized supplies provided by HCA Healthcare’s corporate campuses, including mobile satellite kits – crucial for restoring temporary network connectivity during the crisis – that had been transported from Indiana.

Upon arriving in Asheville early Sunday morning, Joe was struck by the “very well-orchestrated chaos” of the Division Emergency Operations Center. Every moment counted, and he was quickly transported to Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, where he was met with a tearful welcome from a team who had been operating in complete darkness with no radio, cell service or connection to the outside world.

“They were living through the absolute worst time,” he recalled. “Yet, they were still there. They didn’t leave and run home. They didn’t abandon their post. They stayed there to take care of the people, to take care of the patients.”

Joe ultimately was able to get Blue Ridge back online later that evening, but with no vehicle, nowhere to stay, and helicopter teams unable to retrieve him until the next morning, he took up the offer of two mechanical engineers who generously drove him to his next destination in McDowell. With just an old paper map, the trio navigated through areas where all road signs and even stretches of road had been washed away. They ultimately made it to the facility, thanks to a law enforcement officer who stepped in to escort them. By the time he and the engineers had Mission Hospital McDowell reconnected to the internet, it was almost sunrise on Monday morning, meaning Joe hadn’t caught a moment of sleep since Saturday night.

After a 35-minute nap, he was notified that a helicopter was on its way to take him to Transylvania Regional Hospital. He was again struck by the ways in which his colleagues across the organization came together to care for their patients and each other, stepping up to help in any way they could.

Joe eventually returned to the division office in Asheville and was about to collapse onto a mattress in a hallway-turned-bunkroom after days of non-stop work, when a group of nurses urgently needed help contacting their families and getting access to essential information. Despite his exhaustion, Joe quickly set up his laptop and worked to restore a guest Wi-Fi network.

He still didn’t stop there, continuing to work through the night to remotely restore connections for 53 clinics in the area, ensuring they’d be able to operate as normal when colleagues arrived the following morning. Only after everything was running smoothly did he finally get a moment to sleep, knowing his efforts had kept critical healthcare operations going despite the turmoil.

Even after the crisis had passed, Joe knew his work wasn’t finished.

“I went to my whiteboard, and I started drawing,” Joe said, reflecting on how he immediately began planning a new network solution that would better support communication during disasters. He knew that the lessons learned in the field had to translate into a stronger, more resilient infrastructure. For Joe, this experience wasn’t just about fixing problems in the moment. It became about building a system that would keep all our hospitals connected, no matter the crisis.

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They were living through the absolute worst time. Yet, they were still there. They didn’t leave and run home. They didn’t abandon their post. They stayed there to take care of the people, to take care of the patients.



Joe Seely
Wireless Architect,
Information Technology Group,
HCA Healthcare, Nashville, Tenn.



Chapter 2

Partnering to Deliver Hope

HCA Healthcare's unique ability to partner with key organizations and tap into vital resources ensures our patients and colleagues are cared for in the ways that matter most.



Leadership teams joined colleagues and community partners to unload supplies from a helicopter at Mission Hospital in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

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Our colleagues did amazing things under extremely difficult conditions. In the worst times, our communities, patients and colleagues turn to us. And we show up.

-Hugh C. Tappan, President, South Atlantic Division



HCA Healthcare’s ability to step up and stand strong against disasters is reinforced by our expansive network of partnerships.

Hurricanes Helene and Milton underscored just how valuable our partnerships with federal and local agencies are in times of crisis. From pre-hurricane preparations to post-disaster recovery, our colleagues rely on HCA Healthcare’s trusted relationships to ensure our patients receive continuity of care and that our facilities are safe havens in the community.

HealthTrust Performance Group, HCA Healthcare’s supply chain engine, pulled off near miracles in sourcing supplies, water and other critical materials for our people and patients. At critical moments during the storms, vendor partners assisted with patient transport services and additional supply chain needs. Relationships with community entities also enabled us to provide housing, water, fuel and commodities to colleagues so that they could continue to serve.

Relying on trusted partnership starts from the inside out. From the 400 sister-facility nurses and more than 40 physicians who provided support to Mission Health caregivers in Asheville, to the 42 Incident Response Team members deployed during both hurricanes — our teams stood in the gap for fellow colleagues in need.

Caring like family during times of crisis extends to our patients, our colleagues and our neighbors. The communities where we work know the power that HCA Healthcare can bring to an emergency. When city water systems failed in Georgia, area officials reached out to HCA Healthcare. We were able to supply a generator for a water pumping station so that an entire community could have access to water.

“It’s a two-way street,” says Melissa Harvey, assistant vice president of Enterprise Emergency Operations. “That’s really the beauty of working for HCA Healthcare. We’re not just making sure our hospitals are okay. We’re here for our people and patients.”

Colleagues at Memorial Satilla Health in Waycross, Ga. arrive on site to get gas and other necessities deployed by HCA Healthcare to the facility.

Helping hands across HCA Healthcare

Collaboration across the organization is crucial during a crisis. When Helene made headway into northern Georgia and North Carolina, colleagues at sister facilities remained alert and on call.

Hundreds of HCA Healthcare nurses were deployed. They traveled from nearby Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia, and as far away as Kansas, Utah, Texas and California. More than 40 physicians were also dispatched to help serve the western North Carolina region.

When Milton hit Florida one week after Helene, more than 200 colleagues were deployed to assist in Hurricane affected areas.

In addition to the highly experienced Incident Support Team members who lend their specialized skills during disasters, HCA Healthcare provides support directly to colleagues to ensure they feel able to serve, even as they themselves may be impacted by the disaster.

Following both hurricanes, HCA Healthcare established mini marts giving colleagues access to food, water, cleaning supplies and personal hygiene products. Portable showers and laundry units were deployed for colleagues without access to water, and fuel trucks arrived for colleagues and first responders.

In addition, the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund is a 501 (c) (3) charity run by colleagues, for colleagues. Those who give to the Hope Fund support fellow colleagues and their families facing financial hardship due to natural disaster, illness or injury, domestic violence, death of a loved one or other unexpected situations. As of Nov. 7, 2024, the Hope Fund fulfilled more than 3,300 grant requests between Hurricanes Helene and Milton, totaling more than \$2.8 million to date.

“The Hope Fund is in it for the long haul,” says Joe Flynn, AVP, community engagement and president, HCA Healthcare Hope Fund. “As our major disaster history shows, we expect to still be helping colleagues in Asheville and other communities that have had the greatest losses and needs more than one year from now.”

Amazing relationships strengthened in crisis

When communities endure a disaster the magnitude of Helene or Milton, recovery often requires a combination of local, state and federal assistance.

Helene’s impact left a swath of destruction that will forever change the physical landscape of western North Carolina. Greg Lowe, president of HCA Healthcare North Carolina Division, which includes Mission Health in Asheville, says the terrain there made any response especially challenging.

“Our region’s geography made this a unique situation in terms of access to critical resources. Roads are narrow, curvy and built on the sides of mountains or steep terrain,” he explains. “The rain at higher elevations was forced down towards any valleys, with the rain and mud washing out portions of major interstates, bridges and backroads, making areas quickly impassable or inaccessible for long periods of time.”

Because of the difficulty in accessing many areas, Mission Health hospitals relied on HCA Healthcare to fill the gap until state and federal agencies were able to drive through damaged roads with welcome reinforcements. At that time, the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response deployed hundreds of medical, public health and disaster response personnel to assist throughout western North Carolina.

Greg Lowe says initial efforts were boosted by their western North Carolina colleagues — neighbors, community organizations, faith-based institutions, emergency management, law enforcement and first responders.

“The outpouring of support from our community was just astounding,” he says. “Our HCA Healthcare vendors including Davis Water, MSS and First Onsite also showed up in big ways to pump water, manage our central energy plant and clean or perform any remediation work, respectively.”

In the days following Helene, federal Disaster Medical Assistance Teams helped to treat patients in temporary emergency areas set up outside Mission Hospital for noncritical patients.

“Our goal was to free up resources and relieve our hard-working teams, so that we could address the most urgent medical needs of our community and ensure we could take in more patients as rescue and recovery efforts continued,” Greg says.

HCA Healthcare’s mass transport provider, Global Medical Rescue (GMR), was involved in both hurricanes. In addition to assisting with transporting advanced and basic life support patients, GMR provided buses to transport nurses deployed to serve in hurricane-damaged areas. They were also provided with transportation from their hotels to the hospitals.

Behavioral Health Response teams, including therapy dogs from Methodist Healthcare in San Antonio, Texas and GMR, rounded on the Air National Guard, mortuary teams and colleagues at mass fatality sites and within the Mission Health hospitals.

“We couldn’t do this without our national partners like GMR or our colleagues from the State Department of Health. We couldn’t do it without our federal partners that came in and helped us secure the site and manage the initial volumes,” says Michael Wargo. “It’s pretty amazing to see how relationships that we formed ahead of this come into play during a crisis like this.”

Neighbors, not competitors

Milton precipitated the largest scale of pre-storm patient movement and evacuations in the history of HCA Healthcare. About 400 patients were de-risked from our vulnerable hospitals in Florida. Most patients were transported to our sister facilities, but some of our most critical patients went to neighboring non-HCA Healthcare hospitals.

Other hospitals and facilities become neighbors in these moments. Knowing what’s going on and what’s needed across the community means better help arriving to those in need.

“We stress with our emergency managers across the company that we want them to build those relationships through established healthcare coalitions,” says Melissa Harvey.

Emergency managers across the company lead healthcare coalitions in their communities, which helps establish trusted relationships with neighboring health systems.

As Milton unfurled its wrath on Florida, emergency managers across healthcare systems conferred in Pinellas County to compare notes and assess the needs. If neighboring hospital systems didn’t have power or water, HCA Healthcare stepped in to assist. When it comes to caring for patients, it’s an all-hands approach.

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I work with super heroes. Despite the challenges our colleagues faced, they came to work through difficult circumstances to take care of our patients and community, and HCA Healthcare was there for us through it all. I’ve never been so proud to be a part of this company and of the work done by my hospital and division.

-Joanna Conley, Chief Executive Officer, Doctors Hospital of Augusta



Sammie Mosier, senior vice president and chief nurse executive (far left), speaks with TriStar Division nurses on September 29 as they load up to travel to Mission Health and support care teams in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

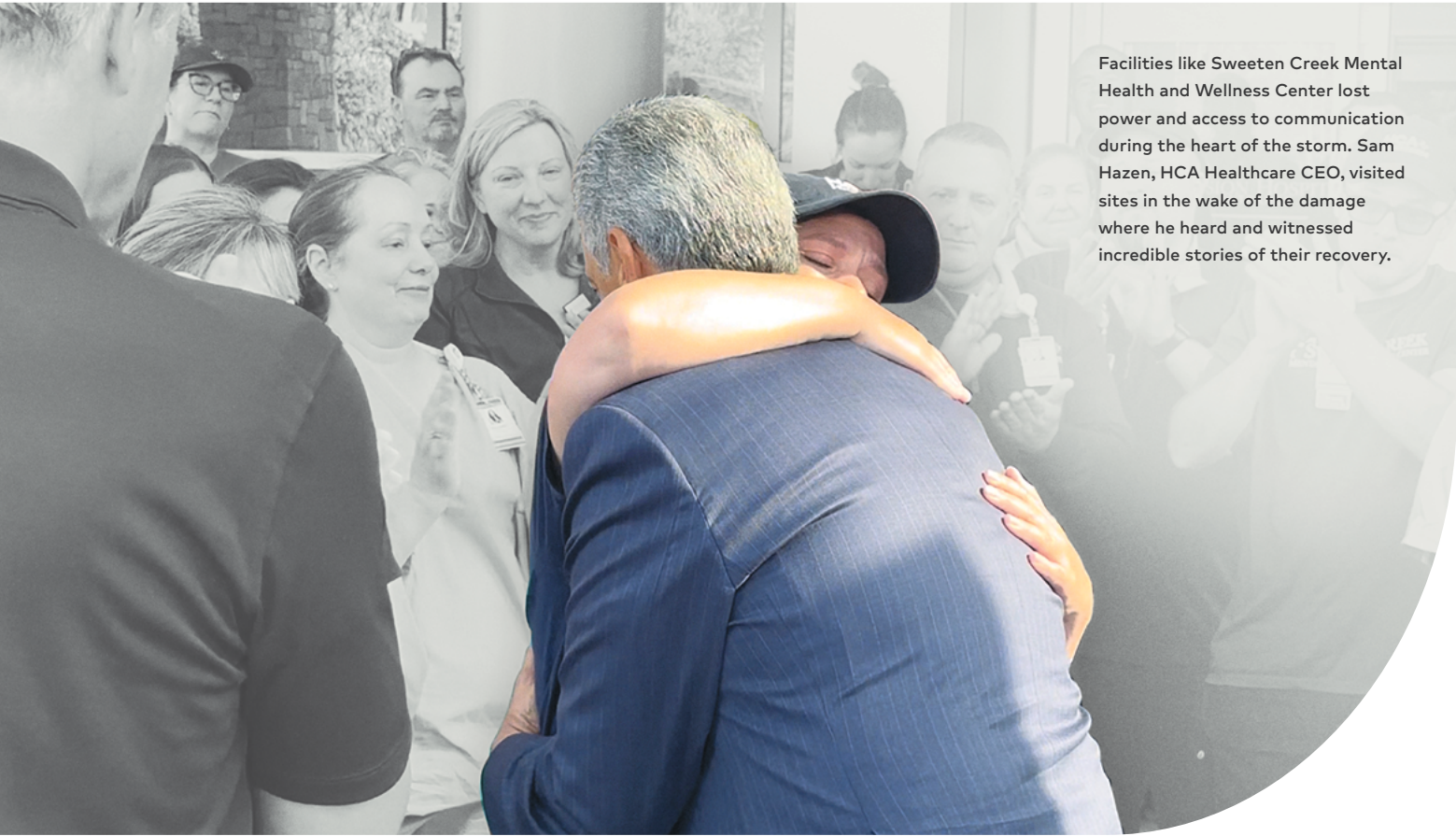
Frontline Point of View

Melina Arrowood

As COO of Sweeten Creek Mental Health and Wellness Center in Asheville, North Carolina, Melina Arrowood embodies a philosophy of care that extends beyond the confines of her office. Melina’s dedication to her team is evident in every aspect of her leadership, from overseeing staffing to ensuring that every employee feels valued, safe and respected. In the wake of Hurricane Helene, which cut off the facility’s communication and infrastructure, the connections she had forged with the Sweeten Creek staff grew deeper than ever. “We lost everything but one another,” she recalled, emphasizing how the experience turned colleagues into a family united by shared resilience and trust.

A personal tragedy in her teenage years fueled Melina’s passion for healthcare. When a car accident claimed the life of her cousin and her cousin’s new baby—as well as leaving Melina critically injured—she found solace in the nursing care she received throughout her recovery.

“That whole experience really drove me towards healthcare,” she reflected. “It created this space in me that gives me the ability to be more empathetic with others.”



Facilities like Sweeten Creek Mental Health and Wellness Center lost power and access to communication during the heart of the storm. Sam Hazen, HCA Healthcare CEO, visited sites in the wake of the damage where he heard and witnessed incredible stories of their recovery.

These early encounters shaped her understanding of the critical balance between medical skills and human connection, strengthening her natural capacity for compassion.

Sweeten Creek serves as a vital lifeline for the community in Western North Carolina, acting as the only large behavioral health hospital in 18 surrounding counties. As the sole provider of care for children in the region, Sweeten Creek plays a crucial role in addressing significant behavioral health needs, particularly for high-acuity patients who lack alternative options. During Hurricane Helene and beyond, the hospital’s commitment to uninterrupted service underscores its importance. The community relies on Sweeten Creek for support and healing in times of crisis.

As the storm descended, Melina’s resolve was tested. “Show up with grit and grace,” she told herself. “These are my people, and they deserve the absolute best of me.” This determination guided her actions, even when the circumstances seemed dire. The hospital was losing more and more of its infrastructure by the hour, but Melina remained focused, reminding herself to “just do the next right thing,” as she transformed each second into a series of thoughtful decisions, allowing her team to adapt and endure the trials ahead.

With communication severed and the roads impassable, Melina and her team faced an overwhelming challenge. Drawing on her ER background, she quickly organized a huddle of physicians, nurses and support staff, imploring everyone to stay put. “I needed every human that was in this building to stay,” she instructed, knowing they would have to work together to navigate the impending darkness. As the day turned into night without power, the team adapted creatively, distributing flashlights and radios to maintain communication.

Despite being in an unsecured building with over 140 people, they were able to triage immediate needs and keep patients safe and calm. Melina encouraged her team to keep moving, saying, “Please stay on your feet,” as they conducted consistent rounds on each unit to meet the basic needs of food, water and comfort. The night was daunting, with no lights and an inability to access medications, but Melina worked to create an environment where even the youngest patients could find moments of levity amidst the uncertainty. “We tried to make it fun,” she said, even framing the situation as a “hurricane party” for the children to ease their fears.

The hospital became a sanctuary during those dark moments, where people were met with understanding and support. Staff and facility leaders, many of whom had lost their own homes and

possessions, rallied with Melina and came in on their days off to serve the community with a shared sense of purpose. They gathered to eat three square meals, to be around their friends and colleagues, to hug, to cry. Melina’s gratitude was evident as she described the bonds formed through adversity. “I have such an incredible group of people here who truly love one another. It really is such a gift to get to lead them.”

The experience instilled a profound sense of pride in Melina. “I have never been more proud to work for a company in my life,” she remarked. “The way we show up in such a time of devastation and destruction is humbling and inspiring.” Even in isolation, she never felt alone. Her team became her family, her larger organization became a newfound community, and together they created a safe space for healing. “Never underestimate human resilience and resolve,” she noted, highlighting the strength that emerged from shared hardship. “Trust your team to have your back, lead with courage, smile even when you’re scared, make a plan for the moment at hand, and be nimble.”

In the face of unprecedented crisis, Melina Arrowood’s steadfast leadership illuminated the path to perseverance and hope for both her team and the Asheville community. Reflecting on their collective journey, she added, “We loved each other through it and, as a group, ensured that everyone’s fundamental needs were being met.”

“Show up with grit and grace. These are my people, and they deserve the absolute best of me.”



Melina Arrowood

Chief Operating Officer, Sweeten Creek Mental Health and Wellness Center, Asheville, N.C.



Chapter 3

Built to Care with Compassion

When a community needs care, it is our nurses,
physicians and facility teams who are on the ground.

Summerville Medical Center nurses Paolo DeDios,
Melissa Graham and Lanae Simmons on their way to
assist and support caregivers at sister facility Memorial
Health Meadows Hospital following Helene.



Hurricane season 2024 will go down in history as one of the most catastrophic in the mainland U.S., wreaking havoc in areas that normally aren’t as affected by tropical storms.

Hurricane Helene struck the southeast, killing more than 200 people across six states, including members of the HCA Healthcare family. Thousands of people were missing for days. Then, in Florida, Hurricane Milton unleashed dozens of tornadoes and flooding that led to the record-breaking transport of hundreds of patients to sister and neighboring facilities.

As our colleagues mourned what seemed like insurmountable losses, there were countless stories of heroism and compassion. We witnessed communities coming together and, as the floodwaters receded, hope and gratitude emerged.

Our colleagues — some of whom traveled across the country — showed up with their medical, engineering, logistics and leadership expertise. Most importantly, they showed up ready to provide comfort and to share what they had when it was needed. Whether it was food, water or shelter, our colleagues demonstrated that we weren’t just there to provide medical attention. Our presence meant that communities could depend on us to deliver help when they needed it most.

In Asheville, where residents were without power, Wi-Fi access and potable water for weeks, the community was drawn to Mission Hospital. Some found themselves there to send messages to loved ones. There were mothers seeking formula to feed their babies. And some appeared to have nowhere else to go because their homes were swept away or destroyed by floods.

Many said the city looked like a war zone, because of the fallen trees, downed power lines and debris. Michael Wargo, vice president of Enterprise Emergency Operations, noticed many young adults without families nearby.

He recalls seeing the lights of Mission Hospital in the midst of a darkened city as he arrived by helicopter.

“In any disaster, where the community infrastructure is taken out and we have resources, we become that beacon on the hill and people see the beacon and they flee to our hospitals for shelter, for food, for restrooms, for whatever,” Michael says. “Mission Hospital is at the highest point in the downtown area of Asheville. It is on the hill, and it literally has become the beacon on the hill because there is light and activity there at all times.”

Colleagues at HCA Healthcare’s Fairview Park Hospital in Georgia were on hand to provide support and nourishment to teams responding to Hurricane Helene.



“I’m a true believer that... love doesn’t fade away. And that’s one thing about Memorial Health, their love doesn’t fade away. They show it every day.

-Jennifer Blount, Food and Nutrition Services, Memorial Health Meadows Hospital



Colleagues from across Mission Health took shifts working at the Colleague Mega Mart stocked with provisions from HCA Healthcare including groceries, water, hygiene kits, ice, pet food, cleaning supplies and more for our team members to take home for themselves and their families.

Vignettes of Care

Surviving disaster to care for others

Jennifer Blount, a food and nutrition services colleague at HCA Healthcare affiliate Memorial Health Meadows Hospital, sheltered overnight in a closet with her grandchildren in her Vidalia, Georgia home, as Hurricane Helene made its way through the region. When Jennifer finally made it out her front door three days later, she couldn’t believe what she saw.

Jennifer was unable to get her car out, but knew if her family could just make it to where she worked at Memorial Health Meadows Hospital, they would be ok.

“I know if anyone’s going to help us, it’s going to be my [coworkers],” she told her grandchildren.

They walked seven miles to the hospital, where they were able to eat, shower and rest. Colleagues encouraged Jennifer to rest, but she insisted on working to help feed those caring for patients after the storm. In less than a week, Jennifer’s team served more than 2,000 meals to patients and colleagues.

“Memorial Health is a family of joy and love, and I’m so thankful to be a part of this family,” said Jennifer. “I’m a true believer that where that love’s at, it doesn’t fade away. And that’s one thing about Memorial Health, their love doesn’t fade away. They show it every day.”

From scrubs to hard hats, colleagues eagerly assist

Colleagues are driven to serve, and sacrifice, when the going gets tough. When Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina, Matt Alligood, a nursing director at Mission Hospital remained at the hospital for several days to navigate the aftermath of the storm. Meanwhile, his family was navigating trees that had fallen on their home. Upon hearing this, his fellow colleagues gathered at his home and began clearing trees and debris before he even arrived. Afterwards, they shared breakfast with the Alligood family.

“Words will never do this act of kindness justice,” Matt said afterwards, also noting that the support didn’t end there.

Hundreds of HCA Healthcare nurses from across the country arrived at Mission Hospital to assist caregivers.

“They showed up with a smile on their face, eager to help, eager to give us just a little bit of reprieve. It was amazing,” he said.



Jennifer Dodd, an LPN from TriStar Horizon Medical Center, takes a moment at Mission Hospital to spend time with a therapy dog while helping run the mobile showers for staff.

Father-daughter team to the rescue

As Hurricane Helene swept through western North Carolina, it brought torrential rain that felled trees, caused severe flooding and made much of the region impassable. Cue a father-daughter team from HCA Midwest Health who served as pilot and co-pilot to deliver supplies to rural areas.

Operation Airdrop, a Texas-based nonprofit that organizes general aviation assets in the aftermath of natural disasters, contacted Darryl Nelson, MD and Chief Medical Officer at Centerpoint Medical Center, to request his time and private airplane to help rural western North Carolina communities.

Dr. Nelson flew 2,200 miles within 21 hours of flight time to deliver 2,000 lbs. of supplies with his daughter, Emily Nelson, practice manager for HCA Midwest Health Outpatient Neurology Clinics. Together, they navigated rough terrain within the Appalachian Mountains to deliver food, water, pet food, diapers and more to people there. Despite the devastation, the Nelsons witnessed optimism and gratitude.

“Even during such a heart-wrenching situation, the community coming together and just seeing the positivity in it when there’s so much negative was the most rewarding thing,” Emily told KCTV 5 reporters.

A people-first promise from day one

The Frist Foundation was established in 1982, by two of HCA Healthcare’s founders – Dr. Thomas Frist, Sr. and Dr. Thomas Frist, Jr. The Frist Foundation invests in promising organizations with high ambitions of improving communities across Nashville. Their specific focus lies in grants that strengthen the capacity of organizations and increase the number of people that can be reached.

In the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, The Frist Foundation has donated \$1 million to the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund, a 501(c)(3) charity that helps HCA Healthcare employees and their immediate families who are affected by financial hardship.

Following the destruction left by the storms, more than 3,400 colleagues have turned to the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund for assistance.

“We are honored to support the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund and the HCA Healthcare family through the immediate and near term needs as a result of the recent hurricanes and flooding in Florida, Georgia and North Carolina,” said Corinne Bergeron, executive director and chief executive officer of The Frist Foundation. “On behalf of our Board of Directors, we support HCA Healthcare employees and their immediate families in need and offer this gift in honor of all who are working to care for patients, each other and their communities.”



The sun rises over Mission Hospital in the wake of the most devastating hurricane since Katrina.



Greg Lowe, president of North Carolina Division, and Tim McManus, president of National Group, join first responders and community partners to receive critical supplies being delivered to the hospital

Frontline Point of View

Victoria Drury

Victoria Drury, an LPN at Memorial Satilla Health in Waycross, Georgia, exemplifies the true spirit of dedication and resilience. Never once calling in sick during her nine years at the hospital, Victoria maintains an unrivaled attendance record that is both inspiring and a testament to her character. When Hurricane Helene hit, leaving many residents stranded and emergency services challenged, Victoria’s unwavering resolve to show up for her community shone brightly.

Victoria, like many in her community, braced for the storm and gathered non-perishables in the days leading up to Helene making landfall, but the impact was greater than expected. Victoria and her family stayed awake monitoring the storm’s trajectory. Despite the howling winds and looming uncertainty, she knew her responsibilities extended beyond her own safety. After keeping vigil through the night while her husband worked as a local detective, Victoria received the unfortunate news that both exits from her neighborhood were blocked by debris. Yet, the thought of not making it into work was simply not an option for her.

After Hurricane Helene blew through, Victoria made it to her shift at Memorial Satilla Health by any means necessary to ensure she was on hand to care for her patients.



“I live about 10 minutes down the road from the hospital, so I figured that it would be easier for me to get work, compared to those that live further away,” Victoria explained. Her sense of duty led her to call the hospital, and she was told that Emergency Department Director Ashton Poole would personally come pick her up at first light if she could make it out to the main road.

The journey from her house out to the pickup point was not an easy stroll. Navigating through downed trees and fallen power lines, she trekked with determination. For Victoria, dependability is more than a personal value – it’s a legacy she aims to pass on to her children. “I always try to teach my children to be somebody to rely on. Your character is your word, and I try to be that example,” she stated emphatically.

With every shift she works, Victoria instills those values of dependability and care not just in her children, but in her coworkers as well. Her path to becoming a nurse was deeply personal, having faced her own family’s health challenges with her son, who has undergone numerous surgeries in the last 18 years since he was born. This experience shaped her approach to nursing and to life in general, fostering a profound sense of empathy and patience that she brings into every interaction.

Even as she tended to patients on the front lines, Victoria’s thoughts were with her family. Although her home sustained damage from a fallen tree, she felt fortunate that they were safe and not displaced, especially given the widespread devastation across North and South Carolina, where many of her loved ones reside. This perspective of gratitude amidst adversity is something she carries with her in both her professional and personal life.

Arriving at Memorial Satilla Health the morning after the storm, Victoria joined a team that was grappling with the immediate challenges presented by the hurricane. The community was still reeling from the loss of a beloved local firefighter that morning, and while patient traffic was light initially, it wasn’t long before the emergency department began to see an influx of individuals needing care. By the weekend, the bare-bones team had their hands full with people who had fallen while trying to clear debris, others suffering from dehydration, and those requiring vital medical treatments.

“What stood out was all the admin and staff just coming together to work,” she shared, reflecting on her colleagues joining forces. “We were all in the same boat with no power, no water, trying to figure out food just like everybody else, but we were showing up.” In the early days between the storm and when HCA Healthcare

resources arrived, Victoria and her team worked tirelessly, ensuring that anyone who needed assistance could receive it, whether it was a breathing treatment or simply a cool place to rest.

Victoria’s experience during Hurricane Helene is a reminder of the vital role our colleagues play in their local communities, especially in times of crisis. She has seen the importance of leadership through action and example. “Be an example,” she advised her colleagues and community members. “Kindness goes a long way.”

“We were all in the same boat with no power, no water, trying to figure out food just like everybody else, but we were showing up.”



Victoria Drury
Licensed Practical Nurse,
Memorial Satilla Health,
Waycross, Ga.



Chapter 4

Life-saving Transfers and Evacuations

HCA Healthcare is uniquely positioned to find safe care settings and evacuate patients when conditions get dire.



HCA Florida Brandon Hospital EMS
units outside HCA Florida Largo Hospital
standing by to transfer patients.

On October 7, 2024, just over a week had passed since Hurricane Helene made its way through the Southeast, and many teams were still engaged in relief efforts. Despite this, a team of evacuation leaders were now watching Hurricane Milton approach Florida’s Gulf Coast. Mandatory evacuation orders soon came from multiple counties – necessitating full evacuation of multiple HCA Healthcare hospitals.

The choice to evacuate a hospital is never made lightly, and requires collaboration across dozens of stakeholders. Together, they review the clinical needs of patients, advanced weather modeling and historical knowledge about facilities and their geography.

Once a decision is made to move patients, HCA Healthcare’s Patient Logistics Centers spring into action, using best-practices honed over 35 hospital evacuations in the last decade. Destinations and transport plans are identified for every patient, and teams from across the organization work together to track progress and eventually reunite family members with their loved ones. Seamless communication between Patient Logistics, Nursing, Physician and Operations leaders ensures that the entire procedure comes together.

“It can be challenging to secure EMS services in some areas under normal circumstances, and these challenges are significantly increased during hurricanes and other natural disasters,” shared Sean DeLancey, regional AVP for HCA Healthcare Medical Transport. “The investment that HCA Healthcare has made in medical transportation greatly reduced the strain on local EMS systems and increased our ability to keep our patients safe during Hurricanes Helene and Milton.”



However, sometimes unforeseeable circumstances arise, and even the most meticulous planning can be upended.

Hurricane Milton resulted in flash flooding that was beginning to reach the basement of HCA Florida Largo Hospital. Largo is a high-acuity hospital that serves as a regional referral center for complex cardiac care and organ transplant, which means many patients are connected to machines dependent on electricity. From the West Florida Division command center, Amber Boes, division chief nurse executive, and Elaine Polaski, division VP of nursing operations, rallied HCA Healthcare leaders across the Tampa Bay area to make space in their hospitals to receive patients and coordinated the movement of staff. They began to analyze how long certain machines and devices could still operate without power and how long it might take ambulances to reach the hospital to transport patients elsewhere.

“We found in the middle of the night that Largo Hospital was in trouble,” said Justin Andrews, medical transport manager with HCA Healthcare West Florida Division. “It kind of made my gut sink because it wasn’t an evacuation site, it was one of the places we were sending people.”

Largo Hospital was not one of the facilities that had been in a mandatory evacuation zone leading up to landfall, and has weathered many storms in the past. All critical care patients had already been moved to the ground floor ahead of the storm. However, as the hurricane progressed, water levels rose to nearly 7-feet in some areas, damaging electrical equipment and critical gear that impacted both normal and back-up generator power. This caused the hospital to lose power in about 75% of the building, and preempted a total blackout.

When generator power eventually failed, Largo Hospital was forced to evacuate all of its remaining patients. Agency ambulances were not willing to travel through the night at that point, but our colleagues were. The team at Largo turned to transport crews from HCA Florida Brandon Hospital, HCA Florida Orange Park, HCA Florida West Hospital and HCA Florida Capital Hospital.

“The minute the wind speed got low enough, our ambulances from Brandon Hospital were on the way,” said Amber Boes. “We were so excited because we knew they were going to get there and we were going to save these people’s lives.”

The remarkable team of Brandon EMS paramedics were recognized by Tripp Owings, CEO of Brandon, after returning home.

When the weather calmed enough for agency transport teams to get to Largo and assist HCA Healthcare crews, ICU nurse Charles Royster said the caravan of EMS drivers stretched as far as he could see.

“As long as you were awake, you were helping out, trying to make sure that patients were cared for,” he says. “The teamwork was amazing. Everybody was doing what they could. It didn’t matter whose patient it was, they’re all our patients.”

In the next 24 hours, Largo evacuated nearly 240 patients using the combined resources of HCA Healthcare transport teams, local EMS, FEMA, and GMR Emergency Management. Everyone involved – doctors, nurses, paramedics, EMTs and logistics team members – did not rest until all patients were in a facility that could properly and safely care for them.

“One patient had been here for over 70 days and got his heart and kidney transplant the day before,” said Yasmin Franco, RN, an ICU nurse at HCA Florida Largo Hospital. “He didn’t want to leave us. He looked at me and took my hand and said, ‘Would you come with me?’ Of course. We got in the HCA Healthcare truck and he held my hand the whole way there.”

Hurricane Milton set a record for HCA Healthcare evacuations, with 634 patients from 10 different facilities relocated in just three and a half days. The perseverance shown by our colleagues during this time was remarkable, and the operation would not have been possible without the coordination of every individual involved and the resolve to put the safety of those we serve first.

“The crews did it without hesitation,” said Justin Andrews, Medical Transport Manager for our HCA Healthcare West Florida Division. “It’s what they are trained for. This is what these ambulances are equipped for. I couldn’t think of a better team to go to Largo Hospital.”

Our commitment to the care and improvement of human life never wavered.

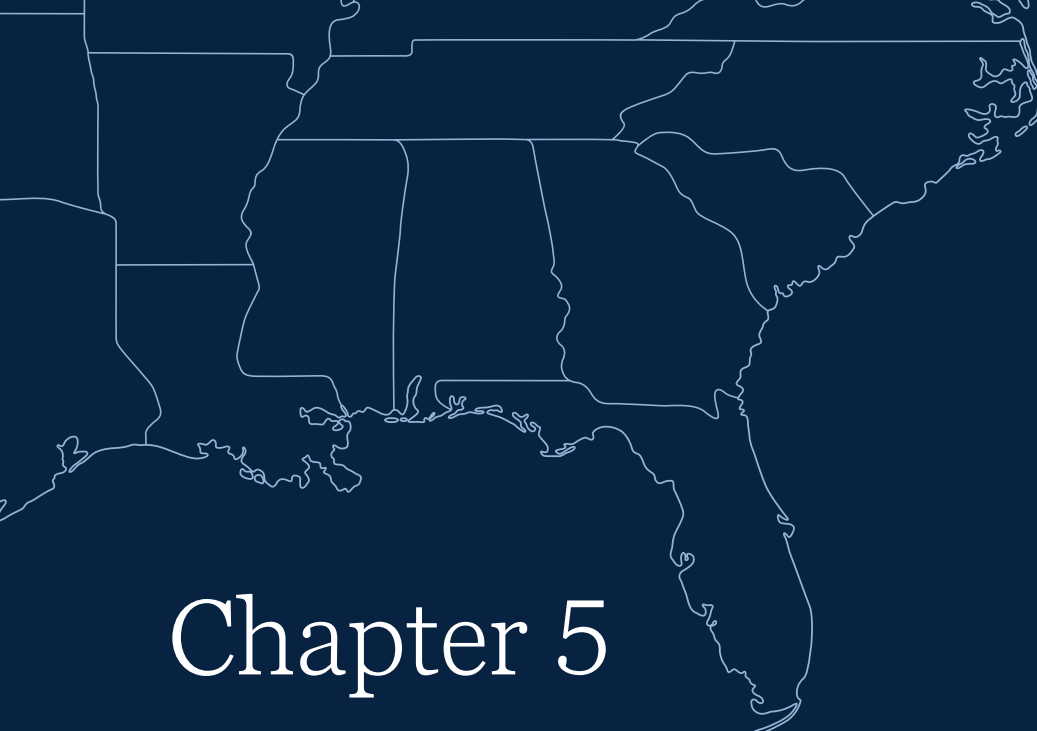
“Collaboration between our Patient Logistics Centers and our nursing partners is key to the successful outcomes for our patients every day,” says Amy Norman, VP of Patient Logistics Centers and Medical Transport. “During emergency events, the partnership is absolutely vital. I’m so proud of the work we accomplish as a team.”



HCA Florida Healthcare ambulance at HCA Florida Largo Hospital.

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As long as you were awake, you were helping out, trying to make sure that patients were cared for.

-Charles Royster, ICU Nurse,
HCA Florida Largo Hospital



Chapter 5

Restoration for Our Communities and Caregivers

After the hurricanes, our colleagues focus on reopening closed facilities, providing mental health support and delivering uninterrupted care.

When a colleague at HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital was left cleaning up his home after a hurricane-induced tornado hit nearby, the facility's engineering team, alongside community partners, jumped in to help him piece everything back together.



Once the storms passed, the rebuilding began. Hurricane Helene, a storm of unprecedented magnitude, left behind a 500-mile path of destruction that crossed six states from Florida to the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Massive flooding, mudslides and landslides significantly changed the Western North Carolina landscape forever. When Hurricane Milton hit Florida less than two weeks later, it wreaked havoc across the state, generating intense rainfall, strong winds, tornadoes and storm surge. Through both storms, hundreds of colleagues rallied to support impacted communities through donating to the Hope Fund, deploying to disaster areas or volunteering in rescue or recovery efforts. Colleagues also shared their skills and personal resources, exemplifying our mission to care for and improve the lives of others.

Our work is not yet done. To restore a community physically and emotionally requires time, presence and dedicated resources.

“The need after a hurricane is so great,” says Amber Boes, division chief nurse executive for HCA West Florida.

Patient volumes surged after both hurricanes, requiring additional staff. A temporary free-standing emergency room was established at HCA Florida Largo Hospital. Colleagues in Amber’s division also faced flooding and structural damage to their homes, which they were able to attend to as a result of the additional coverage received from elsewhere. In Asheville, N.C., Helene disabled the city’s infrastructure for months. When our facilities need repair, continuity of care for both patients and colleagues become paramount. We show up when our fellow colleagues need a helping hand or respite.

Rebuilding across the country

Hurricanes of this magnitude are known to make a far-reaching impact. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the population of New Orleans was reduced by half, and research shows that Katrina had immediate and lasting physical and mental health consequences. These events can leave an indelible mark, and Hurricanes Helene and Milton may be no exception.

When components of an entire town or community are wiped out by mudslides and flooding, a generational impact is left on those living there.

The loss of family homes and businesses, churches and community centers are all felt throughout a community. The economic impact throughout the region will be significant for many families.

Holistically, we are not just responding to the physical impact. We are responding to the humanitarian needs of food, water and shelter. We are responding to the psychological impact within the community.

HCA Healthcare deployed behavioral health resources following Hurricane Helene, including four behavioral health response teams and therapy dogs. Our partners, Global Medical Response, also deployed therapy dogs to provide comfort to community members and colleagues alike. Oakley, a golden doodle, was deployed with handler Nicole Gonzales, an operations supervisor in California, to care for colleagues at Mission Hospital. From HCA Healthcare affiliate HealthTrust, more than 200 colleague volunteers were deployed to assist with sourcing, contracting, Human Resources needs and more.

Mission Health colleagues and community members showed up together to unload and deliver critical supplies in Asheville, N.C.



More than 1,455 Hope Fund grants totaling more than \$1.1 million were provided to North Carolina colleagues. Immediately following the disaster, HCA Healthcare also donated \$1 million through community organizations to aid Hurricane Helene relief efforts in North Carolina. Contributions to the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County will assist immediate and long-term support for flood victims. Another \$250,000 to the American Red Cross of North Carolina will support its shelter locations. Another \$500,000 will benefit additional community partners providing direct support for hurricane-related issues.

“Caring for those in need is our greatest calling at HCA Healthcare, and I am deeply moved by the resilience and compassion of our colleagues,” said Sam Hazen, chief executive officer, HCA Healthcare. “It is our honor to support organizations like United Way and the American Red Cross to help our Western North Carolina (WNC) communities through Hurricane Helene and its aftermath.”

As Western North Carolina (WNC) works to rebuild after the disaster, Greg Lowe, North Carolina division president at HCA Healthcare, echoes what many colleagues have expressed throughout the ordeal.

“Our patients and our inspiring caregivers who have forged through this disaster with kindness and courage are what keeps driving me,” Greg says. “I think we are all motivated by seeing our Western North Carolina (WNC) communities and beyond come together to support each other and rebuild all that we have lost.”

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Caring for those in need is our greatest calling at HCA Healthcare, and I am deeply moved by the resilience and compassion of our colleagues.

-Sam Hazen, Chief Executive Officer, HCA Healthcare



Clinical educators and nurses from HCA Healthcare Tristar Division packed up and traveled to North Carolina to provide support for caregivers and colleagues at Mission Health.

Colleagues at HCA Florida Largo Hospital showed up in force to ensure patients were cared for and the facility continued to deliver services - and hope - during the storms.

Investing in disaster readiness

There’s no doubt that our investment in disaster planning helped saved lives. By following the guidance of the EEOC and leveraging the expertise of our colleagues throughout the organization, we supported our fellow colleagues and their patients. The trusted partnerships established with organizations like FEMA, GMR, the American Red Cross, the Air National Guard and neighboring healthcare facilities allowed us to provide continuity of care to devastated communities throughout the southeast.

“Those relationships are just as important now in recovery, because it’s the advocacy needed of our federal partners to say we need an investment in readiness,” says Michael Wargo. “As a large health system that manages probably the highest volume of healthcare crises in the world, it gives us the experience and the expertise to go to our federal and state partners with evidence to say, ‘This is what we need to do. If (disasters) can happen to us, it can happen to the small rural community hospital that doesn’t have the resources that we do. So how can we mandate future directives based on experience?’”

Teams participate in conversations about how we can build relationships not only with neighboring health systems in the markets we serve, but also with the top academic health centers and share lessons learned after experiences like Helene and Milton. Ultimately, if we can build more resilient healthcare systems throughout the United States, every patient is better served.

Recovery in Florida

As Hurricane Milton headed towards Florida, five HCA Healthcare hospitals were closed ahead of its landfall. Another 324 facilities were also closed, including ambulatory surgery centers, physician practices, urgent care centers and free-standing emergency rooms. Seven HCA Healthcare hospitals were de-risked, transferring critical patients and services out of flood zones before a storm arrives. Following the storm, 239 patients were transported from the hospital to sister and neighboring facilities. To support patient care while HCA Florida Largo Hospital closed for remediation, HCA Healthcare established a modular free-standing emergency department that looks, feels and functions like a brick-and-mortar hospital, allowing colleagues to deliver uninterrupted emergency care to patients.

Tiffany Briggs, director of communications and community engagement for HCA Florida Largo Hospital says it required the partnership of many to make it happen, including the Florida Department of Health. The unit includes room for eight patient beds, with room for expansion. There are also seated waiting areas, a physician dictation room, and a pharmacy.

“It’s pretty incredible,” she says. “They were able to get it up and going within three days.”

Tiffany says their team felt completely supported before, during and after Milton. From the supplies that arrived by helicopter, to Wi-Fi access, to providing fuel for colleagues to get to and from work — Tiffany says the assistance throughout made a difference in how they were able to care for patients.

“Our colleagues are here with us before, during and after the storm, but then they also have things they’re going home to, and that’s heavy as well,” she says. “So emotionally dealing with their patients and getting them through, then going home and having their home life to balance with their loved ones, being able to make things easier for our colleagues is a huge benefit.”

In addition, more than 746 Hope Fund grants were fulfilled following Hurricane Milton, totaling more than \$608,500 as of early November.

“There are so many elements to how HCA Healthcare supports colleagues that then allow us to care for our community,” Tiffany says. “It’s super inspiring to see it all come together. It’s unfortunate that we have to experience it, but it’s incredible to see that support.”



“

There are so many elements to how HCA Healthcare supports colleagues that then allow us to care for our community. It’s inspiring to see it all come together.

-Tiffany Briggs, HCA Florida Largo Hospital

The Impact of a Compassionate Response to Community Tragedy

Within 13 days, more than 50 HCA Healthcare hospitals across the southeastern United States were pummeled by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The storms devastated communities and critical infrastructure throughout North Carolina, Florida, Georgia and beyond. With record numbers of those without necessities such as power and safe drinking water, our network of colleagues, community partners and prepared resources were organized to ensure no disruption in patient care and to expedite recovery efforts. Due to the incredible perseverance and leadership of our colleagues, as well as the emergency preparedness efforts developed to match the scale of natural disasters like these, our teams wasted no time in deploying aid to those who needed it most. From life-saving patient transfers and evacuations to the set-up of generators, flood control barriers and tanker trucks of potable water, HCA Healthcare was ready to meet the historic crisis head-on, leaving an indelible impact on our patients, communities and caregivers.



The Hurricane Helene Story in Numbers



Category 4
hurricane at landfall in
Florida's Big Bend

230+
people died

15+
feet of storm surge

4+
million without power

8
Incident Response Team
members deployed

20+
reported tornadoes
across five states

3,500+
patients cared
for across
Mission Hospital

60+
babies born at
Mission Health

11
generators for
hospital operations

6k
gallon tanker trucks
to provide potable
water into hospitals

95,000
gallons of fuel
delivered daily

6,500 ft
flood control
barrier deployed
at HCA Florida
Pasadena Hospital

200,000
gallons of tanker
water provided daily

\$250,000
to the American Red
Cross of N.C. to help
support its shelter
locations

\$250,000
to the United Way of
Asheville and Buncombe
County to help with
immediate natural
disaster response and
long-term support for
flood victims

**An additional
\$500,000**
was committed to
community partners
providing direct support
for hurricane-related
issues, in addition to our
annual Disaster Giving
Program contribution
of \$500,000



All numbers as of Oct. 2024
unless otherwise indicated



The Hurricane Milton Story in Numbers

Category 3 hurricane at landfall near Siesta Key, Fla.

24+ people died

5+ foot storm surge

2+ million without power

Second storm to reach Category 5 strength this hurricane season

\$250,000 cash donation to the Governor’s Florida Disaster Fund administered by the Volunteer Florida Foundation

\$500,000 to community organizations assisting in the localized relief efforts, including \$250,000 to designated counties through the United Ways of Florida where HCA Healthcare has a presence

Up to \$500,000 in colleague matching gifts to the United Ways, the American Red Cross and the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund

634+ patients transferred before, during and after the storm

Nearly 240 patients transferred from HCA Florida Largo Hospital due to flooding

3 flood control barriers deployed across Florida

275+ colleagues deployed to assist Hurricane Milton-affected facilities

13 Incident Support Team members deployed pre-storm

27 generators pre-positioned

33 fuel trucks deployed to West Florida

11 water trucks deployed during Milton

1 modular free-standing Emergency Department established to provide care while the hospital is closed



All numbers as of Oct. 2024 unless otherwise indicated

Spotlight on Two Special Conversations

Jyric Sims

President, West Florida Division



What did preparation plans look and feel like as you all followed early reports of Milton’s arrival?

HCA Healthcare has a robust storm response plan in place – we’ve been around for 50 plus years. I also think, conducting healthcare in Florida, hurricanes are part of doing business here. Four to five days out, we were getting the reports of a tropical formation. Once it became more of a credible threat, HCA Healthcare’s emergency operations structure in Nashville plugged into our emergency operations structure here.

With HCA Healthcare, the emergency response structure is embedded in what we do, it’s who we are. We have hurricane simulations and disaster preparedness simulations before hurricane season even starts.

What felt unique about this particular event?

Every storm has a different personality and a different makeup and trajectory. But the muscle memory around preparation is pretty well ingrained. Pre-positioning assets, collaboration and communication are paramount.

I was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana so being part of hurricanes is certainly nothing new. But it’s different when you’re responsible for 17 hospitals and 23,000 colleagues and a host of other assets spread up and down the coast. I’m fortunate to have a lot of leaders in the division and facilities who have endured storms as well. Just three years ago Hurricane Ian affected our market, so there’s that muscle memory again.

How did you prioritize what was needed immediately?

For our division, Hurricane Helene was more of a storm surge event. We started to see storm surges of between eight and twelve feet in some areas, so our response there was specific to Tiger Dams around flood-vulnerable hospitals and transferring patients from flood zones. We had generators pre-positioned and response crews ready for Helene.

But the unprecedented nature of the way Milton came through Mexico and angled straight for Florida, I don’t think has ever happened before. It grew to a Category 5 within about 48 hours. We got our A and B teams ready and we were able to evacuate four hospitals and de-risk several others, transferring the most critical patients more inland to sister hospitals and our community hospitals as appropriate.

Things started escalating quickly during Milton, how did that impact your priorities?

Our Largo Hospital is a critical hospital because of our transplant programs. We had two hundred plus patients there at the time of the Milton event. We got so much rain that it flooded the basement of the hospital that housed our boilers, chillers, kitchen, sterile processing for the ORs, all of our plant operations and IT.

We had heroic plant operations leaders, our chief operating officer and VP of operations, down in the basement trying to get the water out and secure the door. We had critical care patients without electricity on mechanical devices that would fail if we didn’t get them recharged. It was serious, and we did not have a single adverse clinical patient outcome during that time.

It definitely sounds like HCA Healthcare colleagues rose to the occasion.

We lost power at Largo, had no electricity, it’s three in the morning with winds at more than 50 miles an hour, and we could not get any EMS or transfer agency to come get our patients. Agency entities are constrained by some logistics and some protocols. So we called on our HCA Healthcare colleagues.

We had five transfer rigs at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital to the east who we called, and their response was, “We’re built for this.”

They got in their EMS rigs in the cover of darkness and drove through the pitch black for two and half hours. They were the first ones on the scene. In that moment, it was HCA Healthcare taking care of HCA Healthcare and that’s what I’ll always remember. They were the heroes. Our teams were the heroes.

It is certainly a testament to the way everyone was ready to respond. How were you all prepared emotionally and mentally?

The first thing is your mindset. We wanted to have clear and consistent communication and to engage a sense of confidence in the plan that we had. We were as prepared as we could be.

We had to reorganize ourselves with leaders and individuals who had just survived Helene. So it was also important to allow time for individuals to go home or make sure their families were okay, make sure their homes were secure and to shore up any family dynamics so that, when we ride out the storm, we are mentally prepared to get through it.

In the midst of so many challenges, what were some of the most encouraging moments you witness throughout the storms?

The compassion of our people and their selfless leadership made sure we were thinking about our caregivers, our teams, our patients, and ultimately ensured that we remained open. We are a critical part of the infrastructure in many of these communities.

Our nursing and patient logistics center, along with our other divisions, without question opened up their doors to accept our transfer patients. It was absolutely remarkable.

What have restoration efforts looked like since the storms?

The recovery, by any stretch of the imagination, has been absolutely phenomenal. I think about the 13 mini marts we had that served over 7,500 colleagues throughout the division. That’s 10,000 cases of baby food, 5,700 cases of pet food and over 10,000 cases of cleaning supplies. Fuel trucks delivered 63,000 gallons of fuel. We had over 350 colleagues supported by our EAP program. Hotel rooms, laundry trucks – that overwhelming response was unmatched in the market by any other organization, bar none. That is showing up for our people.

What would you like to make sure colleagues hear from you?

We owe a big debt of gratitude to all of our colleagues and to HCA Healthcare. Everywhere, from the top of this organization through every rung, there was intentionality around how we responded, making sure our patients, colleagues and communities were safe. When you look to us, we will be there to support you.

Greg Lowe

President, North Carolina Division



At what point was it clear that Hurricane Helene’s impact on Asheville and its surrounding areas would be unprecedented?

Two days prior to the storm’s landfall, a stalled front dumped more than six inches of rain in some Western North Carolina (WNC) locations. This saturated the ground, making it weak and increasing the potential for landslides, flash flooding and downed trees and powerlines when the hurricane winds and rain began. After the worst had passed on Friday morning, and we were able to assess the situation, we realized the devastation and destruction that flooding had caused were unimaginable. Little did we know, for many it would be days before roads were passable and cell service would return to get in touch with families.

What are HCA Healthcare’s usual hurricane preparedness protocols? Did you alter or add to those plans in any way based on those early reports of Helene’s arrival?

Much of the scope of our existing Winter Storm Plan was applicable to the quickly escalating conditions, so we activated that plan prior to the height of the storm to ensure we could provide safe patient care throughout the event. With increased potential of flooding in our area, and the safety of our staff a primary importance, we paid our care teams to sleep on-site at our hospitals and prepare for one to two days of difficult weather.

What were your priorities and what were the immediate challenges?

Our patients are our first priority. Throughout the height of the storm, they were safe. Our nurses, our colleagues, all of our team members did the most amazing job putting them first as our priority. In addition to the more than 700 patients, we knew we had more than 1,200 colleagues sleeping in the hospital, so their safety and that of our colleagues who were outside our facilities was also of utmost importance.

We quickly learned that both internal and external communication were a challenge with the loss of power. Phone lines were down, internet inaccessible, iMobile and overhead pages inoperable – very few of our usual methods of communication worked.

What measures were you able to quickly implement?

To say the first 24-48 hours were difficult is an understatement. We extended our shelter-in-hospital policy for colleagues until they were able to safely travel due to an increasing concern for their wellbeing outside the facility. Additionally, the lack of municipal water was our biggest concern, so we quickly implemented creative ways to ensure clean water and electricity were available in our hospitals. Within 72 hours, the engineers at HCA Healthcare devised a system to drill two wells in order to run our chillers, and used tanker trucks to pressurize more than 200,000 gallons of potable water into the hospital every day so we could continue to safely care for our patients.

How did being a part of HCA Healthcare impact your initial efforts?

As we discovered just how destructive the flooding was, we were concerned about how quickly some critical patient resources would be restored. With no time for us to wait for area vendors to assess, HCA Healthcare quickly delivered. Our access to these resources was crucial and, by Sunday, we saw an increasing level of support arriving at Mission facilities each day.

Colleagues from across the enterprise volunteered to travel to WNC to help relieve our caregivers who had been on-site for days. HCA Healthcare teams increased security measures to ensure our safety, delivered fuel trucks to refill vehicles, set up Colleague Support Center “markets” for staff to replenish necessities, enabled satellite communications and set up mobile units like showers, laundry and kitchens. These resources made available by HCA Healthcare ensured that our colleagues were cared for and available to care for our patients.

What do continued efforts look like now, as of late October?

Access to resources, specifically the need for city water, is still ongoing. HCA Healthcare’s ability to refill supply needs for patients and employees will be critical for the foreseeable future. Many colleagues may need to be redeployed for an extended period of time as their own department duties changed with storm operations and HCA Healthcare is able to provide those opportunities. Mental health resources will also continue as our colleagues face uncertain futures. Finally, while the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund was essential in assisting employees with immediate funds for initial damage, we expect this invaluable program will play a crucial role for any further costs incurred.

How does this compare to other natural disasters or catastrophes you’ve managed?

I’ve been in healthcare for more than 20 years including as CEO of HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital on the Treasure Coast, so I’ve had to respond to plenty of hurricanes. Hurricane Helene was, by far, the worst and longest-lasting severe weather event that any of my teams have managed.

What are some of the takeaways from this experience?

Our colleagues are stronger and more resilient than we ever imagined. The creativity and resourcefulness that I’ve seen from every single person in our facilities is inspiring. There was no one who didn’t roll up their sleeves and do whatever was required in our greatest time of need. We are not a Division where vast emergency preparedness resources are typically implemented. But the support that our HCA Healthcare network was able to deliver undoubtedly saved lives.

What else would you like colleagues to know?

“Thank you” will never be enough for the miraculous ways that our colleagues cared for our patients and each other in the wake of Hurricane Helene. As we recover – and we will – no one is alone in the effort.

Molly Jenson, RN at TriStar Natchez ER, who returned back to Tennessee after supporting our western NC colleagues.



We would like to extend a special acknowledgement to all those who contributed to bringing this publication to life.

Published with care by the HCA Healthcare Magazine team.



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