Weathering the Storm: ICU Nurses Stay Put During Hurricane Irene Despite Evacuation Orders

MOSBY’S NURSING CONSULT – Extensive disaster planning and patient-centered care kept ICU nurses at NYU Langone Medical Center focused on their jobs and resistant to leave 6 of their most critical patients during Hurricane Irene’s wrath last month, reports HealthLeaders Media.

Elaine Rowinski, RN, MPS, CCRN, CEN, nurse manager of the medical ICU, received permission for the 6 patients to remain at the hospital, which borders New York’s East River. Because the medical center’s Tisch and Rusk hospitals are located in Flood Zone A, the NYC Office of Emergency Management and the NYS Department of Health ordered nearly 500 patients to be evacuated on Friday, August 26, in anticipation of Hurricane Irene. Those patients were safely transferred to 26 hospitals, 5 skilled nursing facilities, and 3 hospice facilities across the region, the medical center reported.

Preparations began 2 days before the hurricane was expected to hit. Most patients were transferred to other hospitals; staff collected 3 days’ worth of medications for the remaining patients and stocked rooms with items such as flashlights and ambu bags. Nurses brought in enough personal items to weather out the storm over several days if necessary. And as part of the hospital’s disaster planning, the ICU’s checklist included a provision to check whether patients were on dialysis—giving nurses time to provide treatment prior to when the hurricane was expected to hit.

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