Supporting Texans in Time of Disaster

> **The Issue: Texas lacks a formal statewide disaster response network to allow individuals to have access to their electronic medical histories and medications should they be displaced during natural or man-made disasters.**

In August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey struck the Gulf Coast of Texas destroying homes and lives, displacing hundreds of thousands of Texans and leading tens of thousands to be forced to temporarily relocate to relief shelters throughout the state. Many were displaced not only from their homes but also from the medical providers they rely on for medical care. They left behind medications and medical records they need to receive ongoing and sometimes life-sustaining care. Health care providers, first responders and volunteer health care workers scrambled in makeshift settings to provide care, lacking access to very basic medical information and histories needed for the thousands seeking their help.
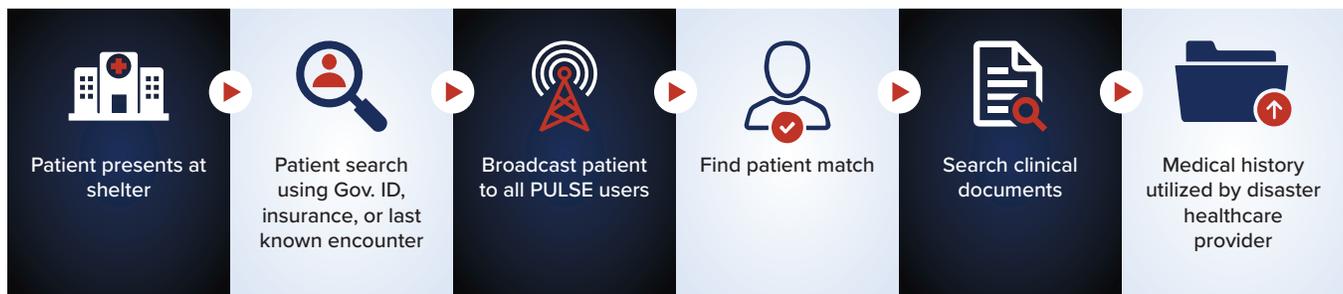
Since the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, much has been done to increase the use of electronic health records and today more than three-quarters of U. S. clinicians use them. But without a systematic approach to ensure access during times of disaster, affected populations remain at risk of not receiving proper emergency or routine care.

> **A Medical Solution for Disaster Response in Texas:**
> **Patient Unified Lookup System for Emergencies (PULSE)**

The Texas Health Services Authority (THSA) is currently working with key stakeholders exploring the development and expansion of the Patient Unified Lookup System for Emergencies (PULSE) in Texas. This is the same system that first responders and medical providers turned to during the 2018 California wildfires. It is also being considered by the states of Florida and North Carolina as part of their statewide emergency response during hurricanes and other natural disasters.

With a simple search on PULSE, authenticated providers can access medications, allergies, diagnoses, and lab results for those displaced outside their typical healthcare environment. The networks that authorized providers link into have already taken all necessary HIPAA precautions to protect patient data. PULSE is designed to provide interconnectivity to enable provider organizations (including health information exchanges (HIEs) and healthcare professionals to query for and view patient documents during disasters).

PULSE limits access to the system by authenticating only authorized users. PULSE allows the viewing of patents' critical medical records and limits access to a "view only" format.

Patient presents at shelter → Patient search using Gov. ID, insurance, or last known encounter → Broadcast patient to all PULSE users → Find patient match → Search clinical documents → Medical history utilized by disaster healthcare provider

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