

# Columbians Taking Initiative

## Focus of Mailman School's New Orleans Aid Shifts to Community Health

By Kelsy Chauvin

More than two months after Katrina struck, scores of rescue and recovery workers—from the Red Cross and other relief groups, FEMA and private industry—remain in New Orleans, helping the devastated city get back to some version of normal.

Their numbers include the Columbia University-sponsored "Operation Assist," a joint initiative of the Mailman School of Public Health and the Children's Health Fund (CHF).

The operation, which was launched in the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina to provide emergency health services for victims, is housed in two Mobile Medical Units (MMUs). Each MMU is a 35-foot-long RV containing two examination rooms and a nurse's station, as well as waiting and registration areas. The units come fully equipped with medicine and diagnostic equipment, computers, satellite and standard communications, and power generators.

On a sunny afternoon in New Orleans last month, a visit to one of these remarkable clinics-on-wheels revealed three doctors and two nurses, from CHF and Tulane



Kelsy Chauvin

Michael Duffy, who has worked for years with the Children's Health Fund serving patients in the Northwest, says he adjusted some time ago to life inside an MMU, where one frequently hears the words "excuse me" as staff and patients attempt to squeeze down the narrow corridor. Here, he treats a young New Orleans patient named Joshua.

University Medical Center, hard at work treating some 60-70 patients.

The team had been at it since one week after the hurricane, when the unit was driven south from Idaho to dispense emergency medical services.

Having been all over southeastern Louisiana, this particular MMU is now stationed at a FEMA disaster-assistance site in a vacated parking lot at

a shopping center in western New Orleans.

In the beginning, the team was treating upper respiratory illnesses from irritants stirred up by the storm. Traumatic injuries, lacerations, and back and knee pain were also common.

Now, however, the unit spends most of its time returning patients to their regular medications. "We've shifted from disaster

response to community medicine," said team leader Michael Duffy, a family physician from Twin Falls, Idaho. "We're meeting emergency needs, getting patients back on their meds, so that we can eventually turn over operations to Tulane [University Medical Center]."

Most of the team's current patients are hard pressed to find medical attention with the closure of so many local doctors' offices, as well as several major New Orleans hospitals, Duffy explained. "There are a lot of displaced physicians, just as there are a lot of displaced residents," he said.

How does the team know whom to target? According to Duffy, "That's the largest obstacle in doing what we do, just finding out where the need is. You have to be a part-time private investigator ... and word of mouth is the best tool for us."

Operation Assist will press on for at least several more weeks, focusing on locations where resources are limited and need is greatest—particularly as residents return to the city and schools reopen.

For more information on Operation Assist, go to [www.childrenshealthfund.org](http://www.childrenshealthfund.org).

## Awards & Honors

The Council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AASS), the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of the journal *Science*, has elected 376 members as Fellows, including four Columbians. **DAVID H. COHEN**, professor of psychiatry and biological sciences, was cited for developing one of the first vertebrate models for cellular studies of learning; **JAMES L. LEIGHTON**, professor of chemistry, for his extraordinary work on chiral reagents for stereo-selective reactions and in total synthesis of natural products; **AARON P. MITCHELL**, the Harold S. Ginsberg Professor of Molecular Pathogenesis in the Department of Microbiology, for his distinguished contributions to the field of molecular medical mycology and his novel genetic approaches to dissecting signaling networks governing differentiation and virulence; and **JEFFREY D. SACHS**, director of the Earth Institute and of the UN Millennium Project, for his original economic research and his commitment to applying that research to issues of sustainable development and global equity. ... **CAROL L. PRIVES**, professor of biological sciences, is among 64 newly elected members of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. Prives was credited for her fundamental contributions to the understanding of tumor suppression and her outstanding and inspiring mentoring to her students and post-doctoral fellows, particularly women. ... With the receipt of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology's Distinguished Scientist Award in 2005, **E. TORY HIGGINS**, a professor of psychology and business management, is now one of only three social psychologists ever to have received the "quadruple crown" of their field. In 1999, he won the Donald T. Campbell Award and in 2000, he received the American Psychological Society's Distinguished Scientist Award and the American Psychological Association's Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions. Higgins is internationally known as an expert in motivation and social cognition, having made major theoretical contributions to both fields. He is currently developing a psychological theory on values and where they come from.

## CU Students Call Meeting to Draft Legislation for \$30 Billion National Tuition Endowment

Seven out of every 10 college students carry debt today, and economists agree that the figure could become nine out of 10 within the next decade—if tuition inflation keeps up its current pace.

Tuitions are rising an average of 7 to 8 percent annually, at least twice as fast as overall inflation, according to the College Board, the New York-based organization that administers the SAT.

In response to this nationwide tuition crisis, student leaders from around the country congregated at Columbia on Nov. 3 and 4 to draft the legislative language for the National Tuition Endowment (NTE) Act, which, if passed by Congress, would generate money from a variety of sources. Interest from federal student and parent loans and the money saved in removing tax-exemption subsidies for private lenders are among the proposed measures for increasing student aid.

The endowment will not replace current Congressional funding to students. Rather, the NTE aims to legislate that all income generated from the federal student aid system, along with real and potential savings from that system, gets returned to students.

The two-day event, co-organized by Nate Walker (TC'07) and Matan Ariel (GS'06), included students from Columbia University,



Eileen Barroso

Nate Walker leads a discussion on crafting the legislative language for the National Tuition Endowment Act, a Columbia-led initiative to provide more student aid.

Barnard College, Teachers College, Yale University, Princeton University, the American Student Association of Community Colleges and the Minnesota State College Student Association, as well as executives from the United States Student Association and the State PIRGs Higher Education Project.

Michael Dannenberg, a former education counsel to Senator Ted Kennedy, and currently the director of the education policy program of the New America Foundation, addressed the students and was on hand throughout the day to assist the group with developing the legislative language.

By the end of day two, the students had achieved consensus on eligibility: low- and middle-income undergraduates will be able to receive a National Tuition Scholarship the same way that Pell recipients currently receive aid.

The NTE Act authors are now seeking bi-partisan sponsorship. "Our hope is that the appropriations and education committees in the House and Senate will review the bill in the spring of 2006 and bring it to the floors in the summer or early fall," said Walker.

To read the legislative draft in full, go to [www.TuitionEndowment.org](http://www.TuitionEndowment.org)

TheRecord

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

UPS 090-710 ISSN 0747-4504  
Vol. 31, No. 5, November 14, 2005

Published by the  
Office of Public Affairs

t: 212-854-5573  
f: 212-678-4817

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of Public Affairs

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The Record is published biweekly during the academic year, except for holiday and vacation periods, by the Office of Public Affairs. Permission is given to use Record material in other media.

University Photographer  
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t: 212-854-6527

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