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EDITORIAL

Hospital Evacuations for Future Storms

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One of the big lessons of Hurricane Sandy is that New York's hospitals are not as well prepared as they need to be. Both the Bellevue Hospital Center, the city's flagship public hospital, and nearby NYU Langone Medical Center, a leading private institution, had become flooded and lost their primary power when the storm hit on Monday night.

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The hospitals, on Manhattan's East Side, started transferring patients out, but soon they lost their backup generators as well. That required the emergency evacuation of hundreds more patients even as ambulances and paramedics were trying to handle emergencies everywhere in the city.

Some hospitals in New York City evacuated patients before the storm hit. But city officials, in consultation with the state, decided not to require evacuations of Bellevue, NYU Langone or Coney Island Hospital, another public institution, because they believed it was safer to leave the patients in the hospitals than to move them without clear

evidence that evacuation was necessary. The conditions, however, turned out to be far worse than expected. An unusually high storm surge knocked out power in that part of Manhattan, and water flooding into the hospital basements disabled the hospitals' backup generators.

City officials and the Health and Hospitals Corporation, which runs the public hospitals, say that the information available 48 hours before the storm's projected landfall, then expected to be late Sunday, suggested the hospitals would be safe because the wind was projected to slow. They also say they followed the city's coastal storm plan, which spells out steps to take before a hurricane.

In light of this disaster, hospital administrators clearly need to re-examine their evacuation planning and re-assess how decisions were made before the storm. Hospitals also will need to bolster their defenses. The fuel pumps in the basement of Bellevue, which shorted out and were unable to feed fuel to the backup generators on the 13th floor, may have to be placed on a higher floor. The elevator cars, which were rendered unusable when the elevator shafts flooded, may have to be redesigned.

New York institutions will require a lot more protection to survive powerful storms, which may well get worse from the effects of global warming. All the patients were safely evacuated this time. Next time, the result may not be so fortunate.

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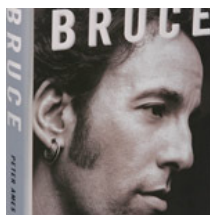
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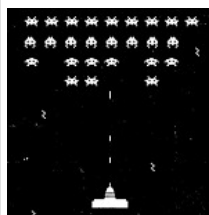


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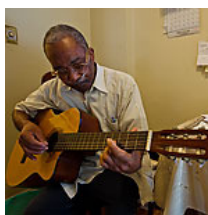
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