



Katrina responder to head UTHSC unit

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Dr. Ruth Berggren, an infectious disease specialist who stayed for six days caring for patients in flooded Charity Hospital of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, has been named interim director of the Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Berggren replaces author and physician Dr. Abraham Verghese, who recently left to take a position at Stanford University.

Berggren joined the health science center in mid-2006 with her husband, Dr. Tyler Curiel, who was hired to head the San Antonio Cancer Institute — an umbrella organization that oversees cancer research programs between the health science center and the Cancer Therapy and Research Center.

Some 200 doctors and patients were trapped for days at Charity Hospital without power, food or water. In a speech to graduating medical students in May, Berggren said: "I was never afraid of wind, water, fire, hunger or disease because I was just too busy trying to figure out what to do. But moments of fear came when I was confronted by agitated, fearful people with guns. It happened twice on my ward."

Search for a permanent director for the center has been suspended with Berggren's appointment and will be re-examined in six months, officials said.