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Wildfire chases patients from LA hospital

By ALICIA CHANG, Associated Press Writer – Sat Nov 15, 6:02 pm ET [Buzz Up](#) [Send](#) [Share](#) [Print](#)



AP – An Olive View Hospital emergency room patient is wheeled down a dark hallway during a wind driven brush ...

LOS ANGELES – Most of the 200 patients were asleep when Santa Ana winds that had swept down from the high desert circled the Olive View-UCLA Medical Center in fire.

Nearby office bungalows went up in flames in the Los Angeles foothills and the fire surrounded a power plant, knocking out electricity to the hospital.

Hospital staff members quickly shut down the ventilation system to keep the smoke out. Backup generators were out, so nurses walked the darkened hallways with flashlights. Emergency room staffers had to use hand-powered ventilators to keep critical patients alive.

Administrators faced a tough choice: Should they evacuate?

"It was organized chaos," hospital spokeswoman Carla Nino said Saturday. "There was a lot of movement."

As firefighters fought back the flames, a decision was made to move more than two dozen fragile patients, including 10 newborns, to other hospitals.

Other patients were picked up by their families. Several left against their doctor's advice.

"The staff was very busy calming down patients," Nino said.

In the midst of the blackout, a pregnant woman walked into the hospital and went into labor. She remained at the hospital.

Utility crews worked to restore power, and the lights went back on at 4 a.m.

The cause of the fire was under investigation.

The hospital had been through it before. Last month, a brush fire forced the evacuation of five patients on ventilators. Other patients were discharged, but the hospital decided it was not necessary to evacuate about 180 others.

Olive View opened in 1920 as a tuberculosis center and later became an acute care hospital.

It was destroyed by the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, and a new facility was built on the same site.

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