

ARRIVAL

We arrived on Thursday the 28th into Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. There was great concern over the needed private security required to enter Haiti. Another group ahead of ours had reportedly been stopped, etc. Once that was addressed, we ended up with a Haitian police car with four armed policemen with semiautomatic rifles. Thus, we entered after this was arranged. This was my first real awareness of the true gravity of the situation. As things deteriorated, sometimes the worse comes out. There is a story that after the earthquake, all of the country's prisoners had to be released. This has led to some of the fear present leading to the enhanced security issue. Since here, we have seen United Nations Security forces walking through the streets consistently. This has certainly helped bring a sense of stability to the environment on the ground.

OUR EFFORT

We worked to bring supplies to an orphanage (Grace Catholic Church/Orphanage). There were 200 hundred girls on site. They have no running water, no plumbing, only had at three day supply of food. Their hopes were dimming as several discussions led to questions to me (especially after they found out I was a psychiatrist) of "how could things get better." Those were difficult to swallow. I attempted to arrange an opportunity for groups to talk, to address their respective concerns, etc. It was rudimentary at best...but I hope and believe it was beneficial.

The risk of danger was still present. Not so much from a risk of gun violence (we had security), but from the overwhelming desire for, demand for, the basics of food and clean water. We were informed that there had been a near rush on the church gates. There were reportedly 18,000 people living inside the preliminary barrier gate, but on the ground. People bathe openly outside, kids are actively naked, and the makeshift tents in which they live are sparsely stable.

CONDITIONS

The air was remarkably difficult to breathe. The open sewage, ever present garbage, limited personal hygiene, and direct/close proximity of so many people was challenging to all. This led to some conflict. There was minor confrontation noted. Overall, I came away impressed with the degree of patience that the Haitian people showed during this most incredible ordeal. We were constantly cleaning our hands with gel, bathed in closets with wipes essentially, and brushed our teeth with bottled water. Precautions to prevent illness to the workers was very high.

MEHARRY

The Meharry donations were very well received. We gave food, bottled water, cleaning solutions (betadine, alcohol, etc.), bandages, personal hygiene items (feminine), antibiotics, etc. We also donated a tent. The girls all sleep outside on the ground, as the fear of another earthquake is palpable. There is so much that we could give. It would all be needed, and very well received.

PSYCHIATRY

Psychiatrically, I am of the belief that we are witnessing the development of a new terminology in medicine. We have rarely before described such a circumstance. In Haiti, such a large number of persons meet the diagnostic criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Pre-earthquake. This clearly catastrophic stressor, in my opinion, has created a new paradigm in disaster relief/recovery. We need to better understand to full impact of this type psychological assault on a person's defense mechanisms. It stands to reason, that any person who has been so impacted has less emotional reserves available to be able to address the primary day to day struggles which they are exposed to. To then have to find additional strength to deal with this new seemingly overwhelming natural event, is more than humans are typically geared to handle.

HAITIAN PEOPLE

We are learning a great deal about people now. These circumstances have brought some of the best love, compassion, and deference to one's fellow man that I have ever seen. There are persons giving the last of available food or water for themselves to the weaker/smaller ones in their group. There are grown men still working to locate others who have been buried (some still alive-as you certainly have seen on television). Further, I have seen many Haitians working diligently to assist the relief workers in our efforts to bring basic needs to their family members, loved ones, and friends.

RELIEF WORKERS

I have also learned a great deal about relief workers. I am with a group from New Jersey/NYC. There are three physicians (one from NJ, one from the DR, and myself), and one nurse practitioner in our group to provide direct clinical services. In addition, there are three ministers from the Bethel Gospel Assembly Non-denominational Church. This coordination with the Arise and Walk Foundation nonprofit relief agency aims to return weekly for at least six months to provide care.

NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

These groups are attempting to partner with others for ongoing support. The National Medical Association has joined the effort. There will be further efforts to grow the relationships into a fruitful, effective, productive, and helpful process for the Haitian people.

As always, I want to thank my president Wayne Riley for his support in this most important endeavor.

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