“HRDF/AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission Disaster Response Strategy for Haiti”

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Haiti Medical Relief Mission

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Over almost forty years, the Association of Haitian Physicians Abroad has contributed millions of dollars to Haiti's health sector through medical services, teaching, equipment and supplies.

The results are measurable in terms of lives saved, facilities improved and personnel trained.
To its credit, AMHE has a broad agreement with Haiti's Ministry of Health for mutual cooperation in planning and implementation of health care, health education, emergency and community preparedness.
Suddenly the January earthquake!

For more than six months, AMHE members and operating units have worked gallantly and at most of them personal expense in a variety of capacities to help Haitians and their medical and health institutions recover from the losses and damages of the earthquake.
Drawing on more than thirty years of working relations with Haitian ministries, civic and business leaders, physicians, nurses and hospital administrators, AMHE Haiti Medical Mission Relief intensified its emergency and routine surgical services, health surveys, educational activities, facility status reports, and policy and program guidance.

Success has been limited only by shortage of funds for operating expenses and improved coordination of visiting teams.
Outside Haiti, AMHE members have convened, attended and participated in a variety of conferences, including at the Organization of American States - to convey their priority concerns and request that foreign aid donors include Haitian Diaspora medical professionals in the recovery, reconstruction, re-equipping and re-staffing of Haiti's health sector.
AMHE stresses that Diaspora professionals have the credentials, culture, connections, motivation and opportunity to be of invaluable assistance throughout the country, and many years' productive experience working with major international responders such as the U.S. Southern Command.
AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission’s recommendations for post-earthquake "health-sector triage" are:

“TEAMS - EMT - CERT”
1) constant, coordinated and expanded presence of Haitian Diaspora teams of physicians, nurses and instructors in Haiti,

2) a national program to train, emplace and equip teams qualified to practice emergency medicine [EMT's] in all 140 communes [townships] and

3) a similar national program to train, emplace and equip teams for community emergency response [CERT's], also at the communal sections level.
Background - Haitian physicians abroad and their colleagues in the medical field have been in high demand for work in Haiti since the earthquake.

In its May bulletin, AMHE reported that more than 400 health professionals had gone to Haiti up to that point, providing both direct surgical and other patient services and detailed status reports on the strengths, weaknesses, needs and trends of Haitian hospitals, clinics, laboratories, other facilities and infrastructure.
The financial burden on Diaspora medical professionals has been onerous, especially because AMHE does not have a treasury large enough to subsidize response to complex emergencies.

As a result, the burden fell on most of the individual practitioners to pay whatever the commercial market demanded, for example, US$3000-4000 per hour for small private jets to carry groups of physicians to Port-au-Prince.
Total costs incurred by Haitian physicians abroad can be roughly estimated. If by now, five hundred have gone to Haiti since the earthquake, each for a week to ten days, their individual expenses may be in the US$5000 range, with a grand total of more than $2.5 million.
Few national governments or charities either officially requested assistance from or offered assistance to Haitian Diaspora medical personnel.

This, despite the obvious advantage of the Haitian medical profession and, for example, U.S. Government contracts and expenditures of more than $800 million to date, including $51,252 for a "neonatal nurse practitioner," $167,979 for an "optometrist."

Haitian-Americans medical personnel offered passage on U.S. Government planes on a "space available" basis were even asked to reimburse the government for the cost of their flights.
Proposal - Through its membership and affiliates, AMHE has access to thousands of qualified physicians, nurses and other medical personnel, both practitioners and students, who would participate in health-related assignments in Haiti.

AMHE Haiti Medical Mission proposes to recruit and maintain on a continuing basis at least one team of five in each department, of week-to-ten-days' rotation to accommodate those who cannot leave their private practice for longer periods.
AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission will establish:

a) a coordinating office outside of Haiti to recruit, assemble and prepare the teams, including their equipment, supplies and itineraries, and

b) a liaison office in Haiti to care for the teams while in-country and to match them with hospitals, clinics and other health facilities that request assistance.

Both offices will cooperate on conducting exit interviews and writing trip evaluations.
Team members - physicians, nurses, therapists, rehabilitation specialists, students, etc. - will be offered compensation for their time. In turn, they will be free to accept all or a portion of the offer, depending on need.
- AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission estimates a compensation range of $2000-5000 per person per trip.

- The estimate for travel, lodging, meals, equipment and supplies is $3000 per person.

- The estimate for coordination by the two offices is $250,000 per year.
Background - Nationwide, the three essential components of emergency medicine, a) pre-hospital care, b) transport and c) hospital care - are either absent, inefficient or poorly functioning. For the majority of Haitians, a medical or surgical emergency is a death sentence.
In 2004, a joint assessment by AMHE, HRDF, MOTION and US SOUTHCOM teams has revealed:

- Neither Haiti's major hospitals nor the fire service provides pre-hospital emergency care. Currently, only the International Red Cross and private ambulance companies provide such service.

- Most Haitian hospitals lack intensive care units and functional, well-equipped emergency rooms.
- Haiti's fire service does not have trained emergency medical responders. According to our assessment, Haiti, with a population of [at the time] 8.3 million has 189 trained firefighters, with only 67 assigned to stations in Port-au-Prince. Yet the National Fire Protection Association [U.S.] recommends a ratio of one firefighter per 1,500 civilians. At that ratio, the capital city area should have two thousand firefighters.

- The fire service had no search and rescue capability.
Improved facilities for EMT needs in Haiti began around 2004 through the initiative of the Humanitarian Assistance Program of the United States Southern Command [US SOUTHCOM HAP].
AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission and HRDF then picked up where SOUTHCOM left off, accompanied by others such as the Haitian American Nurses Association [HANA] in South Florida, the Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas [FAVACA], Mole Saint Nicolas in Action [MOTION], the International Medical Equipment Collaborative [IMEC], Direct Relief International [DRI], the Rotary Club of Petion-Ville, the Office of the Prime Minister of Haiti and Haiti’s Ministry of Interior. Together, they brought EMT training to Haiti on a location-by-location basis.
Since 1989, AMHE, HRDF and MOTION have trained Haitians in emergency medicine, primarily in the capital city area.

Among the students have been medical and nursing emergency room staff of the Hôpital de la Communauté Haitienne [HCH] and emergency units of Haiti State University Hospital. Port-au-Prince firefighters have also received training.
AMHE Haiti Medical Mission and its partners are proud to announce that since November 2008, no less than thirty physicians, fifty nurses, one hundred first-aid workers, ambulance and paramedical personnel, fifteen firefighters and three biomedical technicians have been trained in emergency medicine.
Now, the goal is to create and implement a national program that trains, emplaces and equips teams of emergency medicine technicians in all 140 communes of Haiti.

The objective is to have all teams in place by 2015, fully-equipped and sustainably-funded to quickly and competently save lives in a range of natural and man-made emergencies.
Proposal

AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission's approach will be to train a corps of one-hundred EMT teachers who will then be grouped and dispatched to Haiti's departments where they will conduct EMT training at the commune level. The training will be modular, generally conducted one week a month over several consecutive months.
The objective will be to attract and certify at least fifty Haitians in each of the 140 communes by the year 2015 - seven thousand in all - including physicians, nurses, fire and rescue specialists, police officers, biomedical, mechanical and communications specialists.
The total estimated cost for a five-year EMT nationwide training program in Haiti is approximately eight million dollars.
AMHE Haitian Medical Relief members and partner organizations have witnessed the latter kind of "mass casualty" event as recently as this winter when the earthquake caused terra firma to give way under several Haitian cities at once. Even ladders, the most rudimentary of rescue tools, were in short supply or lacking or inaccessible or broken, not to mention the paralysis of fire engines trapped under collapsed roofs, and the inability to pump fuel because of electrical outages.
After the earthquake struck, Port-au-Prince firemen, police and civil defense personnel, many of whom had received thorough training in emergency training from AMHE's partner HRDF over the years, were suddenly reduced to helplessness. Why?
Because, of the hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign aid and gifts that donors have annually poured into Haiti, the necessary backup emergency response equipment and operating systems that ought to have been priorities were never purchased and safely stored.
It is unfortunate that it seems "everyone talks about CERT for Haiti, but few do anything about it." For years, AMHE Haiti Medical Mission and HRDF have been the exception, especially advocating without success that the Bureau of de la Protection Civile (Civil Defense) be raised to ministerial or at least a general direction level.
And, as far back as 2005, the Haiti Advisory Task Force of the Governor of Florida - that notably included many Haitian-Americans with extensive medical and public health experience - recommended comprehensive, well-funded community emergency response training for Haiti, but likewise to no avail.
Against this void, AMHE Haiti Medical Relief Mission, HRDF and colleagues from countries where CERT has long ago proved its weight in gold, were left to their own devices (and scarce funds) to start helping a few Haitian communities study and practice large-scale emergency response methods.

Among them is Aquin, a city of approx. 50,000 on Haiti’s south-central coast. Last year, HRDF began teaching CERT to approximately fifty Aquin volunteer residents.
The course of study emphasizes helping community members develop a team mentality, then recognize and act out their roles and responsibilities as if a natural or manmade disaster had struck or was about to strike.
Proposal

AMHE Haiti Medical Mission’s approach will be to train a corps of one-hundred CERT teachers who will then be grouped and dispatched to Haiti’s departments where they will conduct CERT training at the commune level.
The objective will be to attract and certify at least fifty Haitians in each of the 140 communes by the year 2015 - seven thousand in all - including residents from all walks of life.
Therefore, the total estimated cost for a five-year EMT nationwide training program in Haiti is approximately $11.5 million.

Using the assumption that the life of a middle class Haitian may be worth $100,000, the return on investment to save approximately one hundred twenty lives from community-scale disasters over a five-year period seems attractive.
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