



AFP Photo/Roberto Schmidt

Haitians queue for water at a distribution point on Jan. 31.

REACHING OUT TO A CRIPPLED NATION

MISSION GROUP POURS MEDICAL SUPPLIES INTO HAITI

BY MARK CRAWFORD

Only a few days after an earthquake devastated Haiti and its capital city Port-au-Prince, Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach in Springfield, Ill., a not-for-profit Catholic organization, was shipping critical food and medical supplies to the damaged island nation.

“We were contacted by Food for the Poor and the U.S. Navy the day after the earthquake,” said Bruce M. Compton, president and chief executive officer of Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach. “Two days later, we shipped a container to Food for the Poor, which arrived in Haiti within 48 hours. We also sent two trailers to Norfolk, Va., where they were

transferred to *USNS Sacagawea* and transported directly to Haiti.” Compton’s organization was also in communication with the Catholic Medical Mission Board and started working on containers of items for them almost immediately.

As of Jan. 29, Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach had sent about 91 tons of

supplies valued at more than \$1.4 million to Haiti via the international relief organization Food for the Poor, the Catholic Medical Mission Board and the U.S. Navy. Materials include surgical drapes and gowns, surgical instruments, sutures, gauze, food and water.

“Their needs are changing very rapidly,” said Compton. “At first they needed bone saws; now they need more high-tech equipment. They are already moving from the short-term goals of amputating damaged limbs to longer-term goals of recovery and care. The



Jonathan Kirshner

Bruce M. Compton, president/CEO of Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach, says needs are changing rapidly in Haiti.

most recent requests are for high-tech equipment such as X-ray machines, ultrasounds and surgical tables.”

FULFILLING MISSION

Compton fell in love with Haiti the first time he visited the country in January 1997. “There was something amazing about it, and I knew right away it was a calling,” he said. “The poverty was striking, but the people were amazing — their smiles and their reactions are forever etched in my memory.”

Since that initial visit, Compton has returned to Haiti many times, leading groups from Illinois and Wisconsin to the Haitian Health Foundation in Jérémie, on Haiti’s southwest peninsula, where he later served as the foundation’s director of administration and finance. After living there for two years, Compton returned to Springfield in 2002 and helped the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis found the mission outreach as a way of expanding their missions overseas. The mission outreach has grown dramatically, now distributing more than \$6 million in surplus equipment and supplies annually, with accountability measures in place to ensure the supplies are distributed appropriately. The outreach has developed

strong relationships with a variety of Catholic organizations, the U.S. military, Midwest Food Bank and the Midwest Mission Distribution Center. It works with more than 45 hospitals and 18 clinics in the Midwest.

“Most importantly,” said Compton, “we have built relationships with hundreds of organizations on the ground in over 50 countries that care for the poor,



KRT/Tim Goheen

sick and needy every day.”

Reaching out to Haiti in its latest crisis aligns perfectly with the mission of the Hospital Sisters’ outreach. “Immediately after the earthquake, we sent out lists of items that were being requested and began communicating with our partners who have operations on the ground in Haiti,” he said. “We also enlisted the services of hundreds of volunteers who continue to assist us with sorting, packing and preparing items for shipment.”

Compton heartily invites other Catholic health care organizations to participate in the relief effort through the Hospital Sisters’ organization. He stressed, however, it is imperative that any donated supplies be fully functional and effective in meeting the requested needs of the relief operations on the ground.

“Sending us outdated or marginal equipment to distribute won’t help the relief effort and wastes valuable resources, especially time and shipping costs,” Compton pointed out. People should check to be sure their contributed supplies will truly be beneficial. “The biggest disappointment for health care professionals in the developing world is when they think they are getting a container of items they can use, and it ends up being unusable for any number of reasons. We have every biomedical item checked by professional biomedical technicians before we send them out.”

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The needs in Haiti will be ongoing and ever-changing over the coming months. How they develop will depend largely on the ability to get infrastructure repaired or replaced. “I believe that the outlying hospitals and health facilities are going to have a need to keep their supplies and equipment levels much higher as people migrate back to the rural cities and villages,” said Compton. “This will be a logistical challenge, as

most of the imports came through Port-au-Prince.”

Compton sees a long-term support role for Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach and other Catholic organizations as Haiti slowly rebuilds. As hospitals and health care facilities are completed and become operational, they must be stocked with sufficient equipment and supplies to provide appropriate care. “This is where programs like ours at Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach will be able to help far into the future,” he said.

Compton is also excited about the possibility of Catholic health-care organizations working together to develop a unified response plan for handling disasters and other emergency situations more efficiently.

“It would be much more productive to have many of these logistics already worked out through a response plan so that when disaster does strike again, we can open the playbook to find, for example, the list of organizations that will assemble medical professionals, the list of organizations that will provide in-kind assistance as needed, up-to-date contact information, a list of initial needs that must be addressed



Hospital Sisters Mission volunteers pack supplies earmarked for Haiti

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immediately in disaster situations,” he said. “If Catholic health care is going to optimize its speed and effectiveness in helping those in need, there must be long-term commitment to using the resources we already have to create an

accepted plan for responding to disasters, as well as building ongoing relationships around the world.”

Haiti could be a great place to start. “There is no doubt this will be a long-term recovery,” Compton said. “We are all called upon to respond, and not only when we can get great PR value. When everyone from the news is gone, I think Catholic health care will have a great opportunity to come together and continue to assist Haiti. We will continue to develop a better understanding for what worked and what didn’t. By sharing this information with each other, and collaborating with disaster-relief specialists, we should be able to determine the best way for Catholic health care to mobilize its resources in future emergencies.”

MARK CRAWFORD is a writer in Madison, Wis.

INTERESTED IN JOINING THE EFFORT?

Financial support is the greatest ongoing need. Contributions may be made through the website, www.mission-outreach.org or by mail to the address below. (Contributions intended specifically for Haiti should be marked “Haiti Relief.”)

Health care organizations able to contribute supplies should do the following:

- Make sure supplies are fully functional and effective
- Call Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach before sending supplies to be sure they will be beneficial

- If possible, be available for long-term support throughout Haiti’s rebuilding effort

- Consider a long-term commitment to a unified response plan for Haiti and other countries when disasters strike

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