

February 3, 2010

Healing Hands for Haiti Must Rebuild after Earthquake

It has been more than three weeks since the devastating magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti and damaged our medical, rehabilitation and prosthetic fabrication facilities in Port-au-Prince. We are very relieved to report that all of our 45 local staff have been accounted for, although many lost family members and most lost their homes. **Healing Hands for Haiti International** has established an emergency relief fund to support them. Unfortunately, it has been confirmed that 80% of our facilities have been destroyed or damaged. Only the guesthouse, which needs structural repairs, remains as a hopeful starting point for a temporary headquarters. Our plans to build Haiti's first *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Institute* in line with national strategic priorities, have been accelerated.

The **Handicap International** emergency response team which includes members of Healing Hands for Haiti International and **Team Canada Healing Hands**, arrived within the first week and has since worked tirelessly assessing and treating victims at hospitals throughout the city, even transporting spinal cord injured to hospitals in the US. Several of our Haitian Board members who are orthopaedic surgeons operate continuously from their hospitals. In the first two weeks after the earthquake more than 2000 amputations were performed in Port-au-Prince and many more are inevitable. Post surgical care, rehabilitation and prosthetic fabricating and fitting for these victims are part of our mandate.

By the end of week two, we had landed a second group of 12 senior Healing Hands for Haiti medical volunteers in Port-au-Prince. They are part of a group of 130 medical and construction personnel and a plane load of equipment and supplies, organized and donated by the **Salt Lake City Utah Hospital Task Force**. A make-shift clinic with power and water was immediately set up on our property and opened to the public the next day; 175 patients were treated. Our team will continue to add medical staff from the Utah County Hospital group and expand services of this clinic as numbers are expected to grow daily and will include patients with many disabilities. The main Utah Hospital Task Force construction team will help clean up, ensure site safety and start guesthouse and perimeter wall repairs.

Our organization is integrating with a larger consortium including Handicap International to help provide acute rehabilitation facilities and services at the major hospital initiative near the airport. A number of Healing Hands for Haiti physical therapists and prosthetists will be temporarily hired by Handicap International for this purpose. This will provide part of our staff and families with immediate security. Healing Hands for Haiti will be joining a collaborative group to include Physicians for Peace, Handicap International, US-ISPO, Medishare and others to address the rehabilitation and prosthetic/orthotic needs of the Haitian disabled population including coordination of human resources, equipment and materials from outside the country to equip physical therapy and prosthetic fabrication facilities.

Healing Hands for Haiti was launched 10 years ago to deliver physical medicine and rehabilitation services to Haitians with disabilities. The scope of our mandate is one of the widest in public health because there are so many forms of mental and physical disability. Prior to the earthquake, January 12, there were more than 800,000* adults and children living with a wide variety of disabilities in Haiti. That's a very high 7 or 8% of the population. The next day the number was much greater and in the weeks and months to come it will grow substantially, and so will the need for our services.

* Pan American Health Organization, 'Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II'

For more information about *Healing Hands For Haiti International Foundation* visit our website at www.healinghandsforhaiti.org or call Executive Director, Eric Doubt at (905) 702-9964.