

U.S. Works With Haiti Government and Other Partners to Help Meet Health Needs After Quake

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PORT-AU-PRINCE - In response to the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti Jan.12, the U.S. is expediting the delivery of medical supplies, providing critical health services, and conducting assessments to help determine health priorities. The U. S. government also is helping to plan for Haiti's long-term public health needs and harmonizing health inputs with other donors and groups led by the government of Haiti and coordinated by the Pan American Health Organization.

"As acute emergency needs are met, accurate and timely disease surveillance is key," said Dr. Ronald Waldman, coordinator of U.S. government health efforts from USAID, and a clinical epidemiologist at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. He said immediate health priorities include providing surgical/medical services to treat injured survivors, preventing wound infection and providing shelter, food, clean water and sanitation. He added that longer-term efforts will ensure availability of a basic package of health services to Haitians through the public and private sectors.

"In addition to meeting immediate needs, we must work in concert with Haitians, other donors and groups to plan and support requirements for new clinics and hospitals, while also building local capacity to effectively manage the system in the future," said Waldman.

The U.S. government has more than 270 medical personnel in Port-au-Prince, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and others. These members work for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and the National Disaster Medical System.

As of Jan. 24, U.S. Government medical teams had treated more than 10,700 patients. This includes figures for the hospital ship USNS COMFORT, where medical staff have treated 1,427 patients and performed more than 93 surgeries, with 243 patients still onboard. The ship's bed occupancy is anticipated to rise from 940 to approximately 1,000.

Under the leadership of the Pan American Health Organization, the U.S. is an active partner in the United Nations health cluster for Haiti that includes more than 135 non-government organizations, bilateral aid organizations and governments. The cluster is working to support the Haitian government's efforts to deliver health care to the population by coordinating activities and sharing expertise, medicines, staff, and logistics capacity among all agencies working to help the people of Haiti.

