

HURRICANE MARIA

HEART TO HEART INTERNATIONAL'S RESPONSE IN PUERTO RICO



"Make no mistake - this is a humanitarian disaster involving 3.4 million US citizens."

**- Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello
September 2017**

HELP FOR AN ISLAND IN NEED

Left without food, water and medical care, the residents of Puerto Rico were reeling after Hurricane Maria blew through the U.S. territory on September 20, 2017. The category 4 hurricane with 155-mph destroyed homes, flooded roads and wiped out power for the entire 3,515-square-mile island.

Heart to Heart International responded with volunteer medical teams, medical supplies, medicines, food, water and hygiene items. The scale and reach of the response was unprecedented, with issues arising daily to challenge the logistics of such a quick and large response. With ingenuity and problem solving, HHI was able to deliver aid to thousands of people in the hardest hit mountainous regions of Puerto Rico where no other help had arrived. Heart to Heart International did what it does best: bring help and hope to people who need it most.

Just 3 days after the storm left the island, HHI's advance team traveled by helicopter from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to Caguas, Puerto Rico, a major city south of the capital of San Juan. The team landed at Hospital Menonita De Caguas, and nurses at the hospital, relieved to welcome the first aid workers, rushed to greet them.

The team, which included Dr. Gary Morsch, retired U.S. Army Colonel and co-founder of HHI, encountered significant damage at the Hospital Menonita De Caguas. Windows were blown out, parts of the building were missing and water was still standing in some areas. Just 5 floors of the 10-floor hospital were operational, and the entire hospital was running on power from generators, leading to no air conditioning and much of the hospital functioning in the dark. Patients, including 100 inpatients, crowded throughout the hot and stifling hospital, with the lobby serving as a makeshift ER and the chapel as a trauma room. Upon arriving, Dr. Morsch immediately began work in the emergency room, relieving staff members, most of whom had not left the hospital and had been working non-stop since the hurricane first hit.

With this advance team treating patients and making assessments about the needs of various communities, a second, larger volunteer medical team was stuck on the mainland, trying to find a way into Puerto Rico. Without power for air traffic controllers, the main airport in San Juan was closed to commercial air traffic. The exact timeline of the airport resuming service was nebulous. After struggling with this uncertainty for several days, HHI accepted Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. International's offer for free passage via its cruise ship to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The cruise line offered free passage not only for the disaster response medical team, but also for the space to carry gear, medical supplies, generators, vaccines, and a portable refrigerator with battery pack for those vaccines.

The addition of more doctors, nurses, EMTs, paramedics and logistic personnel allowed Heart to Heart International's medical teams to push westward through the mountains, meeting with hospital administrators, mayors, and other officials, and finding areas of need in which HHI could assist.

Though all of Puerto Rico was impacted by the hurricane, the areas in the mountains were arguably hit the hardest. Already isolated and lacking economic prosperity, the mountain communities had limited access to health care prior to the hurricane. Maria's landfall exasperated an already precarious situation for many people in these communities. When



Heart to Heart International learned about the desperate conditions many of these people were facing, teams knew where they needed to be. While also setting up clinics and relieving medical staff at towns along the southern coast, including Arroyo and Patillas, the majority of Heart to Heart International's work in Puerto Rico was concentrated in the the most treacherous and difficult to navigate areas of the central mountains.

"In cooperation with Puerto Rican officials, we've moved through the central mountains bringing doctors, nurses, medical supplies and a portable lab. We've also distributed medicines, hygiene kits and in some cases food and water from FEMA," Jim Mitchum, CEO of Heart to Heart International, said in the midst of the response. "Heart to Heart International's work in the central mountains of Puerto Rico is unparalleled."

In Jayuya, a remote town in the mountainous region of central Puerto Rico, the mayor took the HHI team to the town's small 8-bed hospital, where up to 80 patients a day were being seen in the ER. One very tired doctor and a couple of nurses were trying to take care of everything, 24 hours a day. HHI placed a medical team in the hospital in response to the request for extra doctors and nurses. The exhausted staff were extremely grateful for relief.

Elevators in nursing homes and high-rise retirement centers were frozen when the power went out and many elderly residents were left trapped in their rooms without food, water or medication refills. In the town of Comerío, Dr. Mike Paterson, a volunteer from Colorado, visited one of these patients. An elderly gentleman with

cancer was in distress, and Paterson provided medicines and care for the patient, allowing the patient to remain in his home rather than navigating the chaos outside.

HHI also reached out to the many pharmaceutical plants in Puerto Rico, alerting them to the presence of HHI teams and offering aid to their employees and families. Multiple medical clinics were performed on location for these plants, with HHI teams providing medicine, vaccinations, medical care and hygiene supplies.

For the first two weeks of the response, medical students from San Juan Bautista School of Medicine in Caguas volunteered as translators for the HHI team. After that concluded, HHI needed an out-of-the box way to effectively help Puerto Ricans without the need for translators. On October 6, that help arrived from a most unexpected spot on the globe: the tiny island nation of Haiti, itself well-versed in the damage and destruction caused by natural disasters.

Through their associations with HHI in Haiti, a 10-person team of doctors, nurses and logistics personnel traveled to Puerto Rico to aid in the disaster response. Having been trained and practiced in tropical medicine, the team members, who all spoke Spanish, were particularly qualified to treat victims of a hurricane in the Caribbean. Haitian doctors and nurses know to look for and are familiar with common tropical disease presentations.

"We had this team of well-experienced and trained doctors in Haiti who could speak Spanish and who wanted to go. They wanted to help," Jim Mitchum, CEO of Heart to Heart International.

Mitchum and Gary Morsch, co-founder of Heart to Heart International, knew obtaining the paperwork for Haitians to serve as medical humanitarian relief workers in Puerto Rico was going to be an unprecedented feat. Together, Morsch and Mitchum met with the Secretary of Health and Assistant Secretary of Health for Puerto Rico to explain the situation and the unique qualifications of the Haitian doctors. Having worked with five of the team members for years with HHI, including one since the 2010 earthquake, Morsch and Mitchum could vouch for the team's capabilities. And, for the first time in history, a letter of approval was given

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— JIM MITCHUM
CEO, HEART TO HEART INTERNATIONAL

to Heart to Heart International to bring doctors from Haiti into an American territory to treat disaster victims.

The Haitian team concentrated their efforts in the hardest-hit, most difficult-to-reach areas in order to deliver care to people no one else had helped. With skill and ingenuity, these professionals crafted relationships with US officials, religious leaders and local government representatives and were able to treat more than 2,600 US citizens.

"We have a history of helping other nations; of reaching out to those in need. That's our history," Josue Andre, Director of Programs for Heart to Heart International – Haiti, said, referring to Haiti's history of helping nations fight for independence throughout history, including Haitian soldiers fighting for America in the Revolutionary War in 1779. "We have this mentality to be on the side of those in need. We've been losing that sense of reaching out because we've been on the receiving end for so long. But, that's our history."

In addition to personnel on the ground, Heart to Heart International has sent 76 shipments of urgent humanitarian aid to victims of Hurricane Maria. With a total value of \$1,553,565, the shipments included water, hygiene kits, generators, flu vaccines and tetanus vaccines.

HHI's last team of 2017 left the island in late December, but Heart to Heart International's work in Puerto Rico is not finished. HHI continues to work to ensure access to adequate health care is available to those who need it most.

Collaborating with the Ministry of Health and leadership on the island, HHI has been identifying the clinics that serve the most vulnerable and hardest-hit communities, concentrating on the regions in the central mountains. These clinics serve those with the greatest needs and fewest resources. HHI will support these clinics with medicine, medical supplies, volunteer health care workers and hygiene kits and will continue working to find ways to best support the clinics' efforts to reach those in need.



HURRICANE MARIA RESPONSE BY THE NUMBERS

Heart to Heart International responded to the September 20, 2017, hurricane that devastated the island of Puerto Rico with personnel, volunteers, medications, hygiene supplies, equipment, food and water.

31,204

PERSONAL HYGIENE KITS, INCLUDING SOAP, TOOTHPASTE, SHAMPOO AND OTHER ESSENTIALS, DELIVERED.



33

VOLUNTEERS

4,100

HOURS

WORKED THROUGHOUT THE HURRICANE MARIA RESPONSE.



76

SHIPMENTS OF URGENTLY NEEDED MEDICAL AND HUMANITARIAN AID DELIVERED TO VICTIMS OF HURRICANE MARIA.



4,114

PATIENTS SEEN BY TEAMS OF HHI MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS.



12,660

FLU

5,890

TETANUS

DOSES OF VACCINES DELIVERED TO ISLANDS IMPACTED BY MARIA

