On the COVER

One Responder's Experience in Haiti

John Broach, MD, MPH, Fellow, Disaster Medicine and Emergency Management, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, UMass Memorial Medical Center



It is hard to overstate the level of destruction that the earthquake brought to the already poor nation of Haiti on January 12, 2010. In the initial hours after the earthquake, the people of Haiti began what will be one of the largest disaster and humanitarian responses in history. I arrived in Port-au-Prince on January 26th, and as part of a team of clinicians from the University of Massachusetts and support and logistics staff from International Ministries, an NGO with operations in the Dominican Republic, joined thousands of other responders to do what could be done in that very challenging environment. In just a few days, our team provided medical care to over one thousand Haitians, some of whom had not received assistance of any kind, and all of whom have been living in quickly assembled camps with no source of clean water, food, or adequate shelter.

Our experience in Haiti demonstrated not only the importance of the field of Disaster Medicine but also the need to continue to engage in what will be a humanitarian emergency for months to come. It is an unfortunate truism that the images on television and in the media fade long before the suffering in the wake of catastrophes of this magnitude. This disaster will require a sustained response, and the need for prolonged medical relief will be one of the most important aspects of the rebuilding process.

While the need is immense, the problems that the world faces in Haiti do have solutions. The commitment that the world shows to finding and implementing those solutions must be seen as a test of our collective commitment to the humanitarian ideals that underlie the discipline of Disaster Medicine.

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