

Doctor Makes Medical Mission to Haiti



When news broke about the Haiti earthquake, most of us wondered what we could do. Many of us donated money to help, and some made a trip to Haiti to do whatever they could to alleviate the suffering. One of those people is [Eric Mizuno, MD](#). Dr. Mizuno is a physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and he was part of a medical missions team that flew to Haiti to treat injured patients.

Making it work

When Dr. Mizuno heard about the earthquake, he knew he wanted to do something, and he started planning right away. Because his faith is an integral part of his life, he prayed for guidance, and in a very short time, he said "God provided me with a way to get to Haiti." With the help of many people, he was able to not only get transportation to Haiti, but also to gather supplies to bring with him.

He knows that without the quick response from those willing to help, he wouldn't have been able to do the job that he did. It was a Sunday night when he learned he had a place on the medical missions team with an organization called Vision of Hope Ministries, and by the following day, people from all over Chicagoland had mobilized to get supplies and food to Dr. Mizuno to take with him. Northwestern Memorial, along with Walgreens, donated medical supplies for the mission trip, and friends and family helped him get everything ready to go with very short notice. He wants them all to know how very grateful he is for their help.

Arriving in Haiti

When he arrived in Haiti, the team he was with joined doctors from Boston and New Jersey who were already staffing the hospital, and they started triaging and treating patients right away. At first, their treatment space was a small hospital with room for only 15 to 20 patients. But when word got out that the medical team was there and had supplies, military helicopters started arriving every fifteen minutes with seriously injured patients. So, out of necessity, the team turned a nearby school into a hospital so they'd be able to accommodate as many people as they could.



Before the supplies arrived, most patients with limb injuries had to have their limbs amputated because they didn't have the necessary supplies or enough staff to perform limb-saving operations. However, as more staff started to arrive and the supplies became plentiful, they were able to perform operations to save patient's arms and legs. 80 to 90 percent of patients who arrived at the hospital required surgery, and wound infection was the rule rather than the exception. So as you can imagine, the medical staff was extremely busy. When they didn't have the best tools for the job, they improvised. One example was creating a spacer device to deliver asthma medication out of a plastic water bottle.

Smiling through the pain

One of the things that amazed and moved Dr. Mizuno was the attitude of the Haitian people. "The courage, strength and gratitude of Haitians were always evident," he said. "'Self pity' is apparently not part of their vocabulary. Pain relieving medication had to be strongly urged. Their expectations are so low that I believe they accepted the severe pain they were in as a normal part of their injuries and something that just had to be accepted and survived until the pain resolved on its own."

He wants to stress, however that "while you see brave smiling faces, clearly the situation remains dire and desperate, especially in Port au Prince. As you know, aside from the very severe physical injuries, so many have lost their homes and too many have lost their families. I shared and shed many tears with so many patients."

Much still needs to be done

As people outside of Haiti move on with their lives, he knows that the plight of the Haitian people will become a distant memory for many. But he wants to get the message out that the Haitian people "will have ongoing medical needs as they recover from surgery. They will need postoperative rehabilitation, and many will need prosthetics." In addition, he says, "they have nowhere to return to and many have lost family members. Patients, upon discharge, cannot go home. There is no home in Port au Prince to return to. They will need extended physical care but also emotional and financial and spiritual support as they all reinvent their lives."

Dr. Mizuno does not want people to focus on what he or his team did for the people of Haiti, but rather on what still needs to be done. Having been to Haiti and having seen the devastation and destruction, he knows all too well how the disaster that the earthquake left cannot be repaired overnight. "The recovery from homes being lost, businesses being lost and families being destroyed will take years to decades - long after the images have left the TV screen and our active minds." He urges everyone to "please, please, please continue your generosity and continue to actively participate in their recovery process with prayer and donations."

To learn more about Dr. Mizuno's time in Haiti or what you can do now, [watch his story](#) on WGN.

What You Can Do to Help

Although the Haiti earthquake is no longer the center of media attention, the people of Haiti still need help. All of the Northwestern Memorial Haiti volunteers have come back with one message – the devastation will continue, and there is still a great need. Learn more about how you can help by [giving donations to the American Red Cross](#).