

Haiti Update
by Brian Hakala, MD

-Learn as much as possible about the area from people who are in the area or have recently returned.

-Experience with mission work in a country before a disaster may be useful, but may also be misleading due to the tremendous changes, overconfidence, and the different nature of a mass casualty situation.

-Iridium satellite phone service may facilitate communication within and between groups.

<http://www.allroadsat.com/rentals/iridium-rentals.aspx>

-If a group splits up to work in multiple areas, planning a communication time (e.g. 1800 GMT) ahead of time may be helpful.

-A .PDF file with translations of phrases useful in the medical setting may be sent by email for printing or transfer to a smart phone.

-Other .PDF files may be sent to team members with relevant review articles (e.g. on crush injury management, malaria prophylaxis, etc.) maps, information from earlier teams, and useful phone numbers and email addresses (e.g. other group members, military contacts, embassy or other diplomatic contacts, a US contact person for the group etc.) There are many opportunities to read such information on a smart phone while traveling to a remote location.

Example:

<http://www.facs.org/trauma/advdismresponse14-16.pdf>

-It may be useful to take a supply of Ciprofloxacin and Cephalexin.

-Treating two pairs of scrubs with permethrin spray before leaving home protects against mosquito-borne disease.

<http://www.sawyerproducts.com/faqpermethrin.htm>

-Single use packets of insect repellent wipes are convenient to carry, share, and use.

-Bring Sharpie or similar permanent markers and 2" silk tape to make a personal name tag (name & role) and to label patient dressings or fixators with diagnosis, date of surgery, and plan.

-Minimize blood loss intraoperatively.

-Increase OR capacity by speeding up turnover rather than by operating faster.

-If possible, think of 2 or 3 ways of managing a patient's problem and solicit opinions from team members before deciding on a course of action as one will encounter novel situations.

-Meet with groups from other countries to exchange ideas, information, supplies, and stories in the evening when possible.

-Read advice for disaster relief volunteers on the CDC website before leaving.

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/news-announcements/healthcare-providers-haiti-earthquake-response.aspx>

-For larger groups, a daily team meeting at 8pm works well.

-An LED headlamp and spare batteries may be helpful in the OR and at night.

-A "bag shower" may be handy.

<http://www.seatosummit.com/products/display/59>

-Consider bringing a water filter.

-Closed shoes or hiking boots are better than Tevas, Crocs, or sandals.

-Review the CDC website and/or speak with an ID specialist regarding immunizations and malaria prophylaxis.

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

And:

http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/resources/pdf/new_info/2010/Malaria%201-pager_Mar4v5_508.pdf

-Register with the US Dept. of State before leaving the US.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_1186.html

-Carry your passport with you at all times.

-Keep an up to date patient census list at all times.

-Look into the American College of Surgeons patient information database

<http://www.facs.org/trauma/updatehaiti-datagathering.html>

-Get to know interpreters.

-Keep a flexible outlook.

-Take all the food you will need. Divide it up into portions using small Ziploc bags. Combine several different such bags into one quart bags to make meal size bags. Strive for variety.

-Divide up Gatorade powder into small bags to add to 500mL or 1L bottles of water.

-Pass on knowledge, protocols, and patient information to the following team.

-Have a media policy

-Look into protocols for sterilizing equipment without an autoclave.

-Try to keep some structure to days.

-BGAN satellite internet works well for email, but does not have the bandwidth for Skype calls and other bandwidth-intensive applications.

<http://www.allroadsat.com/mobilerentals/info.aspx>

-Before leaving home look into plans and packages to reduce the cost of smart phone data and voice services.

-Rite-in-the-Rain paper and notebooks made by J. L. Darling, Inc. work well in humid and wet environments such as Haiti.

<http://www.riteintherain.com/>

-The American College of Surgeons and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons websites have much useful information for physicians planning to work in Haiti.

<http://www.facs.org/trauma/updatehaiti.html>

And:

<http://www.aaos.org/news/whatsnew/haiti.asp>

-Earplugs make it easier to sleep

-Bring sunscreen

-A pack or duffel bag may work better than a suitcase

-The UN makes a very nice 1:10,000 scale map of Port au Prince.

-Continuously updated maps of Haiti are available online

-Safety first

Best Regards,

Brian