

'Boro natives' nonprofit aids Haiti

Medical teams in rural area to help quake recovery

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About a week after a major earthquake hit Haiti, a group of medical professionals decided not to focus on the big cities affected by the 7.0-magnitude quake but a rural town south of Port-au-Prince.

A team from Aid for Haiti has spent the past week providing medical care to the residents of Petit Goave.

Founded by two Murfreesboro natives, the medical ministry has seen about 300 patients a day, according to Elliott Tenpenny, a physician who helped start the organization.

"There are cities along the southern peninsula of Haiti that are pretty much inaccessible to the larger relief efforts," he said.

Aid for Haiti's initial team included two doctors and four others including a nurse and a paramedic. Tenpenny said that team will be returning this weekend, and another team is headed to Petit Goave Thursday.

"There (are) some very dedicated Haitian nurses that lost

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everything in the quake that are staying there and helping night and day," Tenpenny said.

Aid for Haiti was started in 2008 by Tenpenny and Caleb Trent, who is also from Murfreesboro. They traveled to Haiti several times helping treat patients with severe iodine deficiency in remote areas.

A team from the nonprofit arrived in Haiti a week after the earthquake struck.

The massive quake shook Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas Jan. 12, killing an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people. The aftershocks that followed contributed to thousands of injuries.

Tenpenny, who is an emergency medicine physician at the Mayo Clinic, said initial injuries of victims included broken bones, head injuries and skin abrasions. Now, the team is seeing conditions like gangrene,

which is a decay of body tissue.

"They have delivered quite a few kids," he said about the team's work.

He said many babies "have been born in terrible conditions" and umbilical cords have been cut with unclean objects causing infections. Some mothers' breast milk has dried up.

"The babies could be newborns and have not had anything to eat for 10 days," Tenpenny said, thus making it hard for their young immune systems to fight diseases.

He said a Haitian government official told them they were the only medical team in Petit Goave. Operating out of an old abandoned hospital, about 300 to 400 people wait to receive assistance every day starting as early as 6 a.m.

Tenpenny said, "the biggest need is donation of supplies and cash."

He said the group plans to continue to send mission teams through April.

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