

17 January 2010

Sunday

Dear Members of the Academic Medical Community,

The international community is coming together to respond to the critical needs of Haitians in the aftermath of Tuesday's earthquake. Coordination of this mammoth relief effort is under the lead of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). In its fourth Situation Report (15 January 2010 - available online at www.reliefweb.int), UN OCHA communicated to the international medical community its concerns regarding gaps and duplications of medical efforts on the ground in Haiti:

"Concerns are raised that a large incidence of unsolicited and uncoordinated influx of humanitarian personnel and supplies entering into the country could stretch limited, critical logistical resources and impact the delivery of assistance. NGO consortia have been asked to play a role in monitoring and assessing the capabilities of voluntary organizations wishing to help."

The willingness and capacity of our national academic medical community to respond to this crisis is evident. Many medical response teams from our academic teaching hospitals are on the ground already in Haiti or are due to arrive in the coming hours and days. **To make the most of their talents and get them to where they need to be without delay, caring for patients, it is critical that medical response teams register and coordinate with the UN Health Cluster lead and UN OCHA.** For UN OCHA to coordinate medical efforts on the ground, it is paramount that they know which medical teams are present and what expertise they bring with them.

To this end, a website has been created to provide central registration of all academic teaching hospital medical response teams responding to the crisis in Haiti. This is called the World Academic Teaching Hospital (WATCH) Disaster Relief website and is available at www.physiciansfordisasterrelief.org. Registration of academic medical response teams takes seconds to complete. **Importantly, the website provides full contact details of the UN Health Cluster lead in Haiti so that academic medical response team leaders may be in direct and immediate communication with lead UN officials.**

Also, Dr. Paul Farmer, of Partners in Health, has, via the Boston Globe, "sent out an SOS yesterday to all US hospitals, asking whether any can accept severely injured patients from Haiti who are in dire need of surgery." To this end, **The WATCH Disaster Relief website has added a link for hospital administrators to register their contact details and how many patients of what specialty subpopulation (ie. burns, orthopedics, ophthalmology etc.) they are able to receive from Haiti.** Again, this information will be directly communicated to the UN Health cluster lead in Haiti. Please click "Hospital Registration" at www.physiciansfordisasterrelief.org.

Please forward this email to all Department Heads of all academic teaching hospitals affiliated with your institution. Our hope is that they will then forward the registration links to their medical response team leaders in the field and hospital administrators here at home who can then complete the online registration and contact the UN Health Cluster lead and UN OCHA directly.

At this hour, time is critical. We hope that the WATCH Disaster Relief website will help your academic medical response teams coordinate their expertise with the central Health Cluster lead and UN OCHA heading this international humanitarian relief effort.

Sincerely,

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