Medical specialists top Haiti needs list

Medical specialists are the first category of volunteers needed to assist earthquake survivors in Haiti. Officials with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) say they will be working with the Methodist Church of Haiti and other organizations to provide medical and relief services.

Many other volunteers will be needed later as Haiti recovers from the Jan. 12 earthquake, which destroyed much of Port-au-Prince, resulted in an estimated 200,000 deaths and left 2 million homeless. Currently, however, Haiti’s shattered infrastructure cannot support volunteer teams.

Dalton Rushing, director of communications in the office of United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) for the denomination’s Southeastern Jurisdiction, said transportation is a major concern. “The main problem is that it’s just about impossible for volunteers to get in and out of Haiti,” he said.

The New York Times reported a looming medical crisis in Haiti as the wounds of thousands of earthquake survivors remain untreated and the number of bodies left in the rubble increased the risk of disease.

GBGM advises that some medical specialists may want to respond to a call from the U.S. government for trauma surgeons, orthopedists, anesthesiologists and others with experience in treating crush injuries.

United Methodist volunteer teams have been working in Haiti for decades and Rushing predicted that people with any number of skills — including construction, education and pastoral care — would be welcome once the country is able to support those workers. Short-term volunteer experiences can last from one week to two months. The coordinator for the Southeastern Jurisdiction is Paulette West, who can be contacted at (404) 377-7424 or sejinfo@umvim.org.

Placement for individual long-term volunteers, serving two months to two years, is possible as the recovery in Haiti progresses. More information is available at www.individualvolunteers.info.

“We will be working in Haiti for a long, long time,” Rushing said.

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