

HHS Activates Additional Components of National Disaster Medical System to Help U.S. Hospitals Treat Survivors of Earthquake in Haiti

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Washington, D.C. – As part of the ongoing medical response to the Haiti earthquake, USAID, the agency coordinating the US Government response, announced today that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has activated additional components of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) to help U.S. hospitals provide care to critically ill survivors.

“Medical evacuations have only been used in limited instances where patients had medical needs that could not be met in Haiti,” said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah. “We are committed to working with Haitian people and the Government of Haiti to create long-term care facilities in-country. Continued medical assistance is critical to these efforts. We will continue to work across the whole of the U.S. Government and with international partners, and NGO partners to ensure the well-being of the Haitian people is the foremost priority.

This activation will allow U.S. hospitals that treat Haitian patients evacuated with life-threatening injuries due to the earthquake, to receive federal reimbursement for the costs they incur. The first NDMS flight could leave Haiti as early as tomorrow.

“States have been tremendous partners in the response effort to the devastating earthquake in Haiti,” said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. “This is part of our larger strategy, working with the government of Haiti and our international partners, to help increase the capacity both inside Haiti, as well as in the U.S. and other countries, to help Haitians who need critical medical assistance.”

Haitian and American patients will be referred by Haitian hospitals, NGOs, the USNS Comfort, or other facilities if they meet criteria for evacuation. These evacuations are being reserved for the rare patients with life-threatening conditions that cannot be handled within Haiti or by evacuation to another country. There must also be a reasonable chance that the patient can survive the flight and the treatment in the U.S.

Accredited hospitals, usually over 100 beds in size and located in large U.S. metropolitan areas, are encouraged to enter into a voluntary agreement with NDMS. Hospitals agree to commit a number of their acute care beds, subject to availability, for NDMS patients. Because this is a completely voluntary program, hospitals may, upon activation of the system, provide more or fewer beds than the number committed in the agreement. Hospitals that admit NDMS patients are guaranteed reimbursement at 110% of Medicare rates by the federal government.

HHS has been working with the government of Haiti and international partners to provide life-saving care to survivors of the earthquake. HHS previously activated the field medical care component of NDMS which has enabled approximately 270 health and medical personnel to deploy to Haiti as part of Disaster Medical Assistance Teams. These teams have seen more than 23,000 patients, performed 98 surgeries, and delivered 28 babies since they began providing care in Haiti on January 17 and continue to provide life-saving medical care on the ground.

In addition, public health experts from HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are participating on teams conducting rapid assessments of ongoing surveillance of health conditions in Haiti to help prevent and contain additional health threats to the people of Haiti following the earthquake.