

# *Navy Medicine*

Spring 2010

Official Magazine of U.S. Navy Medicine

## *DESTINATION:* **HAITI**

Saving Lives  
And Providing  
Hope In Haiti





**Charter**

NAVY MEDICINE is the professional magazine of the Navy Medical Department community. Its purpose is to educate its readers on Navy Medicine missions and programs. This magazine will also draw upon the medical department's rich historical legacy to instill a sense of pride and professionalism among the Navy Medical Department community and to enhance reader awareness of the increasing relevance of Navy Medicine in and for our nation's defense.

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# NAVY MEDICINE

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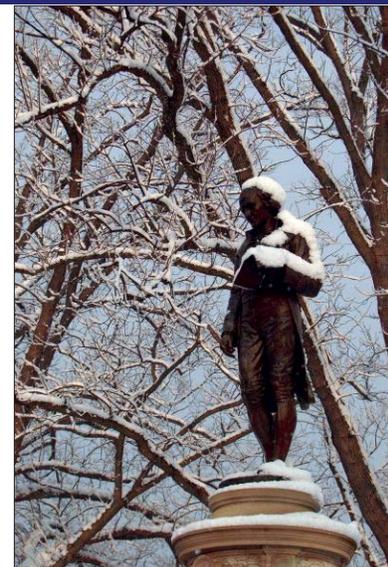
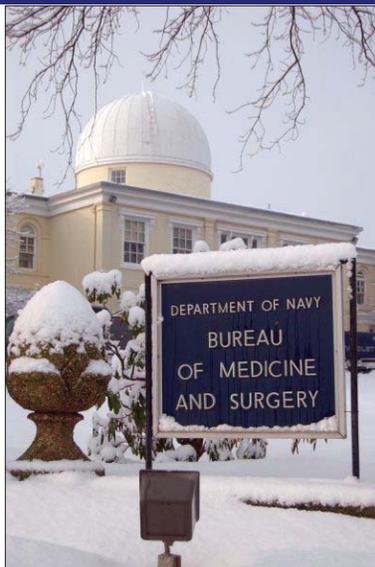
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The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery campus and the statue of Benjamin Rush successfully weathered the blizzard and gale force winds that swept the Washington DC area in January 2010. (Photos by Cmdr. Cappy Surette)

# NAVY MEDICINE

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### ON THE COVER:



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti. The U.S. Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) is seen off the coast of Haiti. Comfort conducted humanitarian and disaster relief operations as part of Operation Unified Response after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake caused severe damage in Haiti Jan. 12. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Daniel Barker/Released)

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# NAVY AND CIVILIAN MEDICAL TEAMS WORK TOGETHER TO PROVIDE HOPE ON COMFORT

The Navy broke all records in getting its hospital ship, USNS Comfort underway to support U.S. Southern Command's relief efforts in Haiti following the devastating 7.0 earthquake in the country that left more than 230,000 dead. While the initial medical team onboard was comprised solely of Navy personnel due to the short-fused nature of the response, the ship soon began to welcome civilian medical professionals from throughout the United States who volunteered through a host of non-governmental organizations (NGO).

The first wave of NGO medical volunteers boarded Comfort Jan. 27 and began working side by side with the embarked Navy medical team to provide critical care for Haitian patients who were hurt during the Jan. 12 earthquake.

Project HOPE had 76 volunteer doctors, nurses and other health professionals representing 18 states and the District of Columbia during Operation Unified Response. Volunteers included medical professionals with experience in surgery, neonatal intensive care, pediatrics, post anesthesia care, intensive care and physical therapy. In total, The Navy team onboard Comfort welcomed 244 volunteers from numerous NGOs throughout the mission.

"We worked closely with NGOs like Project HOPE to bring in volunteer support to sustain the long-term mission of care for the people of Haiti," said CDR Brad Hartgerink, Director for NGO Coordination at the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. "There were a number of outstanding NGOs eager to participate in the global outreach to help all those in need in Haiti."



Project Hope volunteer pediatricians Dr. Curran (left) and Dr. Wu take care of the youngest earthquake survivors onboard the USNS Comfort now off the coast of Haiti. (Photo by Astrid Riecken)

The Department of the Navy has become increasingly involved with other U.S. government agencies and NGOs since it adopted a new maritime strategy in 2007 that elevated stability missions to the same priority as combat operations and committed itself to working more closely with its civilian partners. Project HOPE has worked side by side with Navy during 15 other humanitarian missions including the Indonesian tsunami relief, Pacific Partnership, African Partnership Station, Hurricane Katrina and was quick to send credentialed volunteers from their database who were already experienced in working side by side with their Navy counterparts.

According to Cmdr Tim Donahue, the Comfort's Director of Surgery, the pace of providing medical care in the face of such devastation was challenging.

"The first day wasn't really a day in the truest sense of the word," said Donahue. "The first day lasted about 40 hours. That was when many of the crew members got their first break. It

only lasted about 4 hours and we had another 40 hour day receiving casualties.

Over the first four days, the team on Comfort received helicopters delivering patients every six to nine minutes. "All beds in our casualty receiving bay were filled by the early afternoon of the first day and remained filled for days as we cycled critically injured patients aboard the ship for care," said Donahue.

### *Non-Governmental Organizations Supporting Operation Unified Response*

American Red Cross: 104

Operation Smile: 13

UCLA: 6

Johns Hopkins: 6

Project Hope: 87

Orthopedic Trauma Assn: 11

University of Michigan: 8

United Nations Nurses: 9



**Project HOPE volunteer Paul Firth, a pediatric anesthesiologist from Massachusetts General Hospital works onboard the USNS Comfort off the coast of Haiti. (Photo by Astrid Riecken)**

Given the magnitude of the job, the civilian volunteers also found no shortage of work. Dr. Paul Firth, a pediatric anesthesiologist from Massachusetts General Hospital remembers being woken from a deep sleep at 4:30 am one morning by an announcement of a 'Code Blue in ICU 3' on the ship's sound system that caused him concern. Knowing that this announcement meant someone was dying in the Intensive Care Unit, Firth decided to see if he could help.

"I realized that my colleagues had been working flat out for days and were probably exhausted," said Firth. "I rolled out of bed, put on my shoes, sprinted up eight flights of stairs and pounded along the length of the ship to the ICU."

Firth found a baby who was struggling to breathe and the staff was having difficulty getting a breathing tube into his throat to assist his breathing. He was able to put in the tube and revive the child's blood oxygen levels.

"It was a long run from the lower deck at the back of the ship to the ICU at the stern," said Firth. "I've run about 25 marathons and ultra-mar-

athons in the past, but probably this was one of the more important races in my life."

"Project HOPE and the U.S. Navy together bring an unyielding and selfless spirit of care and compassion to the people of Haiti," said John P. Howe, III, M.D., President and CEO of Project HOPE. "I cannot think of a

more powerful partnership for health and goodwill for the Haitian people than the partnership formed between Project HOPE and the Navy."

USNS Comfort provides long-term support because it is self-sustaining. The safe environment and technology on Comfort make it a perfect asset to conduct training and as a base for DOD and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) enduring support.

"Responses such as our work in Haiti require an unprecedented level of integration among our military forces and enhanced cooperation with the other instruments of national power, as well as the capabilities of non-governmental agencies and others." said Vice Adm. Adam Robinson, the Navy's Surgeon General. "Our sister services and NGOs are valued partners in providing medical care to those in need during this critical mission and will be for many years to come."

Approximately 1,500 Navy medical and non-medical support teams were involved in the humanitarian relief mission in Haiti including those embarked on the hospital ship, USNS Comfort, and other Navy ships providing needed medical assistance throughout the region.✂



**Dr. Jose Irazusta practices pediatric critical care medicine and pediatrics in Jacksonville, Florida. He joined the Project HOPE volunteer staff onboard the USNS Comfort on January 27th to care for children injured in the January 12 earthquake in Haiti. (Photo by Astrid Riecken)**