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Tragedy reverberates with area aid groups

By Rebecca Layne
The Winchester Star

Winchester — Dr. William Burslem's initial thought when he felt the earth move in Haiti was that he stood at the epicenter of everything.

"Your first reaction is, 'I must be the center of the universe and the center of the earthquake,'" he said Tuesday.

But Burslem, a Winchester resident and retired physician, was more than 200 miles from Port-au-Prince in a town called Terrier Rouge, which experienced a smaller shock, a 5.0-magnitude quake. (The most powerful blow, at 7.0, struck near the nation's capital.)

After checking the Internet, he said, he was "left with a realization that things were a lot worse elsewhere."

Burslem, an internist, was working in a medical clinic in Terrier Rouge. He went to Haiti with his daughter, Pastor Carrie Evans, and seven members of her congregation, who were working to paint and repair the clinic.

After the earthquake occurred, the group saw an influx of refugees who had fled Port-au-Prince.

"There was clearly a tremendous amount of anxiety over the earthquake," Burslem said. "They were experiencing post-traumatic-stress disorder."

"The next day, the aftershocks sent children running out of the school. The local people were scared to death, too."

The earthquake has also affected the nearby orphanages in Les Cayes.

Donald Stevens, founder of REACH, a nonprofit agency operated from his home in Winchester, said the orphanage in Haiti that REACH sponsors, Pwoje Espwa Sud, will receive about 250 orphans from Port-au-Prince.

This will raise the number of children in the orphanage to 900.



Dr. William Burslem, a retired physician from Winchester, cares for a young patient at the Clinique Esperence et Vie in Terrier Rouge, Haiti, recently. Burslem was visiting with a group led by his daughter Carrie Evans, pastor at Warrenton Presbyterian Church, when the earthquake struck Haiti last week. (Photos provided by Carrie Evans)

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"Thousands and thousands of kids and orphans are fleeing Port-au-Prince," Stevens said. "Their headmasters, directors, and staff are dead. These are kids without parents."

He said the president of the largest microfinance bank in Haiti asked for his help in building homes and banks. Stevens said he has enough material to build the foundations of 10 to 20 homes, but at \$10,000 per house, funding will be the biggest hurdle.

"We've been there [in Haiti] and we've been working really hard," he said. "The only thing that is stopping us is money."

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Project HOPE, an international nonprofit health-care agency based in Millwood, is operating a warehouse in Santo Domingo in the adjacent Dominican Republic that has about \$1 million in medical supplies — bandages, tape, gloves, and over-the-counter medicines such as Tylenol.

The supplies are being transported over the border to Haiti.



In the days after the earthquake shook Haiti, trucks from other parts of the nation, loaded with supplies, began long journeys toward the capital, Port-au-Prince. This truck was traveling through Terrier Rouge.

Another shipment of materials totaling \$175,000 is being shipped aboard the Comfort, a Navy hospital ship that will reach Haiti Thursday. The Comfort has 1,000 hospital beds.

"We're discussing with the Navy now about how many civilian volunteers are needed," said Rand Walton, director of communication for Project HOPE (Health Opportunities for People Everywhere).

"They're still not sure there will be civilians on the ship, but we're still looking for medical supplies and [medical] volunteers for hospitals right outside Port-au-Prince," he said.

The number of volunteers could range from 20 to 200, Walton said. So far, 1,200 medical professionals have applied to volunteer.

This week, Project HOPE sent DynoGlobal water purifiers to Haiti. It expects to send antibiotics, insulin, and vaccines by the end of the week.

"The Navy is going to be there six months," Walton said. "We're planning to be there much longer than that. We're looking at the long-term needs."

Carrie Evans, pastor at Warrenton Presbyterian Church, was in the group that traveled to Terrier Rouge with her father William Burslem.

Evans said Port-au-Prince needs all the help it can get, but that people should not forget about the surrounding areas.

"What people need to know is that the people in Haiti live a thin line between starvation and death," she said. "I think we need to think global Haiti and not just Port-au-Prince."

— Contact Rebecca Layne at rlayne@winchesterstar.com

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