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A newsletter for the Touro community

Help for Haiti

“The first 24 hours were overwhelming, but after that it felt like you could never do enough and you never wanted to leave.”

Shortly after the massive 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti on January 12, Dianna Masvidal, RN on T6, traveled to the capital city of Port-au-Prince for a medical relief mission that would reaffirm not only her passion for medicine, but also her belief in the resiliency of the human spirit.

Known as “Kiki” by her colleagues, Masvidal has an extensive background in humanitarian relief work and was quick to heed the call when a close friend and cardiologist at University of Miami reached out for her to join a relief team organized by Project Medishare.

Project Medishare, in partnership with the University of Miami Global Institute, organized on-the-ground medical triage within hours after the earthquake. Project Medishare was seeking medical relief workers with ICU or OR experience to help staff a tent hospital in Port-Au-Prince set up through funding provided by retired NBA star Alonzo Mourning of the Miami Heat.



Touro Nurse Dianna Masvidal traveled to Port-Au-Prince Haiti to assist with earthquake medical relief.

Masvidal was asked to meet in Miami and bring food and water for a 10-day stay. From Miami, Masvidal and fellow volunteers traveled to Port-Au Prince on planes chartered by Mourning, allowing them to forgo any weight restrictions on luggage and bring needed supplies. “I brought 8 gallons of water,” Masvidal shared.

She worked 18-hour shifts at the tent hospital during her stay, assisting in the ICU tent as well as working in ED and OR.

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HERE. FOR LIFE.



Haiti continued

She cared for surgery patients and patients with infections, assessing their medicines. She was the only nurse in the Medishare group from Louisiana and the only volunteer from Touro on ground in Haiti.

The immense devastation from the earthquake — in lives lost, property destroyed, and families displaced — was unimaginable. The earthquake left more than 230,000 dead and more than 1 million homeless.

Recalling the conditions on the ground, Masvidal reiterated the severity of Haiti's state of disaster sharing, "We arrived to no healthcare system. It was the start of rainy season. We worked in a makeshift hospital. The ICU had plywood floors laid over dirt." She explained there were no beds, no blankets, no charts, no orders, no pumps, no alcohol swabs, adding "We only had a minimum supply of oxygen, one ventilator, and two portable monitors."

However, using the supplies they did have, they made it work. Medishare's makeshift hospital divided up medical volunteers to help staff tents that focused on OR, ICU, PEDS, NUCL, and Adult Surgery. They organized smaller tents as isolation quarters for families with TB, Malaria, and HIV. They used stretchers as beds, utilizing trash cans to hold the head of the bed up. They used surgical drapes as blankets. Instead of charts they used pieces of notebook paper pinned to the tent above where the patients lied. Masvidal and fellow volunteers treated almost 300 patients daily in the ED, and an additional 300 or more daily in triage.

She shares that working with humanitarian relief reminds her that things can be done for the best of people, even in the worst conditions noting, "The experience reminded me how small I am. Seeing little kids having limbs amputated and children dropped off in trash cans truly opens your eyes."

Originally from Miami, Masvidal came to New Orleans to attend college at Loyola University New Orleans, where she received her BA in Neuroscience. After college, she served two years as an AmeriCorps volunteer in Gastonia, NC, where she gained extensive experience in HIV testing and counseling—Gastonia has the highest rate of new HIV infection in the United States. Once completing her AmeriCorps term, Masvidal attended Louisiana State University's BSN program. She graduated from nursing school in the summer of 2009 and has been working in Touro's ICU for the last nine months.

Masvidal noted that her background training from Gastonia helped her in Haiti, sharing "There were growing concerns about the risk for increased rate of infection with high



Masvidal worked with fellow volunteers in a tent hospital, pictured above, set up by Project Medishare for Haiti, Inc.



Masvidal, far right, helped work with patients in Medishare's ICU, OR, and ER.

exposure to HIV, TB and malaria, however they are currently controlling their infection controls really well."

She added that regardless of the environment now, she believes that the resiliency and hope in the community will help Haiti overcome the obstacles, noting "they are the most joyous people, and have the highest spirits."

Masvidal wants to return to Haiti for future medical relief work. She shared that some of the locals took a picture of her and wrote a note across her photograph that read "this lady will be back" and hung it on the wall of the ICU tent.

With a smile, Masvidal affirms that she will return, "I have to keep my promise."