



Dominican Hospital

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Dominican therapists head to Haiti

Staff members will work with amputees

SANTA CRUZ, March 18 – Two therapists from Dominican Hospital will travel to Haiti to work with victims of the recent earthquake.

Mary Anne Kramer-Urner, physical therapist, leaves for the Haiti on March 20 with Physicians for Peace. Cheryl Bencala, an occupational therapist and certified hand therapist, will return to Haiti for the second time in as many months in mid-April with the Enoch Choi Foundation.

Ms. Bencala regularly participates in medical missions to India, but couldn't go this year. When she saw the devastation in Haiti—the earthquake coincided with the dates she would typically be in India—she decided there was a larger purpose behind the incidental cancellation of her trip to India.

“My heart was broken by the level of devastation I saw,” she said. “As I was watching it unroll, it became very apparent that they were going to need occupational and physical therapists, big time. I decided that I would try to find a way to go.”

She spent a week volunteering in Port au Prince hospitals with the Enoch Choi Foundation in February.

“The amount of destruction is beyond what the mind can comprehend,” She said. “You see it one the news and it's one thing, but when you're there, you're driving for 10, 20, 30 miles and it looks like a war zone. Every building is flattened, and you know that there are still bodies buried in that rubble. That was the hardest and saddest thing to realize.”

After spending a day volunteering at an orthopedic hospital as the only occupational therapist, Ms. Bencala vowed to return to Haiti as soon as possible.

“There are tens of thousands of patients that have amputations and fractures and wounds; spinal cord patients and head injury patients who need therapy,” she said. “When I was there, there was

no therapist at the hospital I was at. That need resonated with me. These trips are easy for me to do. I never get sick, I travel very easily, and the greatest joy in my life, other than my family, is participating in these medical missions. That's why it's easy to go back. I'll go back as much as I possibly can afford and take off work and deal with my family."

Physical Therapist Mary Anne Kramer-Urner has no history of participating in medical missions, but has felt compelled to join one since watching the fallout of Hurricane Katrina. When she saw the devastation in Haiti, and realized how many individuals underwent amputations but were without the help of trained therapists, she knew that it was time to go.

"Ever since the earthquake, I have had this burning feeling that I had to do something," she said. "I didn't know quite what I would do. Then I saw the sheer volume of amputees who need training and help dealing with issues surrounding their limb loss. That's what I do. That's my specialty. It's clearly obvious that I needed to go."

She registered with Physicians for Peace, intending to travel in April or May. Days later, however, she received a call that a physical therapist on the organization's very next trip—in March—was sidelined with an injury. Ms. Kramer-Urner agreed to move up her timeline.

"Initially, my daughter was pretty terrified," she said. "But she also knows that I feel passionate about this and that my heart is telling me that I need to go. This will show her what we need to do when we see a need in the world. She's seeing if you feel passionate about something, then you do it. You put yourself out in the world like that."