

Florida medical students aid in Haitian earthquake-relief efforts

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A devastating earthquake struck the Caribbean in August and Haiti, one of the world's most impoverished nations, was among the affected countries.

Yamilet Gonzalez, in her second year of studies at University of Central Florida College of Medicine (UCF), had visited the country as a volunteer prior to enrolling in medical school. In her time there, she saw Haiti was already in dire straits. A natural disaster would only add to the need. Gonzalez and other UCF medical students partnered with International Medical Outreach (IMO) to help victims.

"When the earthquake hit, we needed to raise awareness and provide relief," she said. "So, working with IMO, I thought it would be a good idea for our med school class to host a schoolwide donation drive for Haiti."

Learn about seven other remarkable medical students who moved medicine in 2021.

Distribution challenges

Even before the earthquake, the situation on the ground was grim, Gonzalez said. She had worked to help provide care in Haiti prior to enrolling in medical school, making trips to the remote region of Mare-Brigmol, working with IMO.

Getting supplies to Haitians was difficult under normal circumstances, Gonzalez said. The earthquake was going to make the situation even more difficult, however.

"Outside of Port Au Prince, which is the capital, it's incredibly difficult to get supplies," Gonzalez said. "Food, water, medicine, you name it, they need it. The country's infrastructure is not as developed.

After the earthquake hit, students at UCF organized a targeted drive, asking for money as well as tarps, first aid kits, toiletries, batteries, diapers, wipes, nonperishable foods. The first-aid kits, during a

global pandemic, proved to be challenging to get. Because of that UCF turned to the AMA, asking for a grant to help with relief efforts.

“One of the reasons we asked for the AMA to get involved was that need for first-aid kits,” said Lauren Aronson, a second-year UCF med student and AMA member. “They are expensive and the parts of them can be hard to get.” The AMA, through its Medical Student Outreach Program, awarded a grant that allowed for the purchase of more than 70 first-aid kits.

“This was my first time applying for an AMA Grant,” Aronson said. “The AMA really cares about supporting students in their initiatives for community service, and that really showed with this grant. I was really pleased with their response and support for this service project.”

Learn how medical students are helping people without housing stay safe from COVID-19.

About the Medical Student Outreach Program

The grants awarded to UCF came from the AMA Medical Student Outreach Program, a peer-to-peer recruitment program that promotes AMA membership to first-year medical students. It also provides training and recruitment resources to encourage the incoming class of medical students to join the AMA.

For those looking to get involved, the AMA is offering a nine-month leadership opportunity for second-year medical students who exhibit excellent leadership, strong organizational skills and a desire to build their professional network.

As a Student Outreach Leader, you will lead AMA membership outreach efforts at your school as you continue to build your professional network.