

APA's Response to the Haiti Tragedy

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Compiled and forwarded by Roberta Flynn, Psy.D.

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Instead of writing up some information about Haiti, I felt it was important to send you some information regarding the American Psychological Association's (APA) response to the tragic situation in Haiti. I received these two messages from APA through the Disaster Response Network (DRN), the network of Disaster Response Chairs in each state for all state-wide psychological associations.

In response to the terrible tragedy in Haiti, APA members are asking what psychology and APA can do to help. As you may be aware, APA has responded to earlier international disasters and has policies in place to guide our organizational response as well as advise members about how to best respond to such events. To date, Luana Bossolo, Assistant Executive Director, Public Relations, Practice Directorate of the American Psychological Association, APA has done the following:

Information materials on APA's policy for response to international disasters were posted on the home page of the APA website on 1/13. This document will be a valuable resource for APA members and other non-member mental health professionals. We also posted information for the public – particularly to help those distressed because they have family and loved ones in Haiti (www.apa.org).

The APA policy delineates the roles that U.S. psychologists should play in international emergency response settings, recommending no direct services but consulting and training roles and the need for such volunteers to have appropriate training in community psychology and or public health interventions, language skills and cultural competence. It is also important to note that all relief agencies are currently recommending against volunteer travel to Haiti. Needs assessments and direct rescue efforts are the current focus of the response effort. Agencies are communicating the best help that can currently be provided is financial support to relief agencies not volunteers on the ground.

<http://www.apa.org/international/resources/emergency-statement.aspx>

We furthermore want to make APA members aware of the IASC (Inter-agency Standing Committee) Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.

http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

The APA Disaster Response Network has been actively working on response to the earthquake since Wednesday morning. APA staff have been in regular communication with the American Red Cross Disaster Mental Health team. The

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Red Cross is not recruiting any volunteers to travel to Haiti at this time. The response operation is being handled by the Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the American Red Cross's International Division.

DRN members and staff worked yesterday primarily to respond to requests for resources and referrals on how to help Haitian communities here in the United States that are concerned about family and other loved ones in Haiti. We are continuing these efforts today and for as long as needed.

APA's UN representatives are also discussing a response, including offering support to UN families in the New York area that were affected by the UN building collapse. They are coordinating this with other psychology groups at the UN.

In addition, APA staff in both the Public and Member Communications and Practice Directorates are working on media outreach and response to provide news reporters and producers with appropriate experts on the mental health issues raised by natural disasters. Also, we distributed a press release on Thursday describing our available information products on trauma response and recovery. <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2010/01/stress-haiti.aspx>

In addition, the Executive Management Group has recommended and the Board has approved a \$10,000 donation to the American Red Cross for its International Response Fund. APA will be able to specifically direct its donation to Haiti earthquake relief. For anyone who is not aware, there is precedence for such a donation; APA contributed to relief efforts after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia.

Here is an opportunity to serve those who have helped out in Haiti. Also if you haven't responded about the DRN Annual on April 9 it is not too late.
Rick

Many of you may already know that APA is supporting partner to Give an Hour™ (www.giveanhour.org), a national nonprofit organization providing free counseling and other mental health services to members of the military, veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, their families, and their communities.

In response to the tragedy in Haiti, Give an Hour™ will also be offering free mental health services to all volunteers serving in Haiti, including civilians, military personnel, and loved ones of those who volunteer. Thousands of military personnel and civilian aid workers are responding to the crisis, and many will face psychological effects from dealing with such horrific circumstances. Moreover, these personnel left their families and their lives at home quickly and so families may be having a difficult time adjusting to the separation as well.

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While there are more than 4,600 mental health professionals on the network nationwide, there is a critical shortage in many areas, particularly in the communities surrounding our military installations. As we raise awareness about the psychological issues surrounding combat and deployment, more people are seeking services through Give an Hour™.

Give an Hour™ is an important and well respected organization, filling a critical need. If you are willing to volunteer one hour a week (for a minimum of one year) to help our military men and women and their families heal from wartime service or to help our fellow citizens who are providing humanitarian relief in Haiti, please join the Give an Hour network. Registration is quick and easy. Log on to www.giveanhour.org and click on "Providers." Please spread the word to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

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