



The Times

Doctor rushes back to aid Haiti

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STAFF WRITER

As news of the death and destruction in Haiti spread, as photos filtered in of the rubble, the piles of the dead and the tremendous need of those still living, Dr. Catherine Wolf did the only thing she could -- she headed right back down there.

Wolf, a member of Kingston Presbyterian Church, has been in Haiti since Monday, nearly one week after a catastrophic earthquake flattened much of Port-au-Prince, the capital of the island nation.

It was an unwelcome homecoming for Wolf, who has been living and working as a physician in Haiti since the early 1980s.

A bout of tuberculosis forced her to return to the United States for a spell, but the 57-year-old doctor moved there again in 2006 after founding Friends for Health in Haiti, a nonprofit whose goal is to build and run a primary care clinic and maternity center in Gattineau, a mountainous region in the west.

Wolf was actually in the United States when the 7.0-magnitude earthquake hit just outside Port-au-Prince on Jan. 12. She was expecting to fly down again Tuesday to continue working at the site of the planned clinic, which lies nearly an hour south of the coastal city of Jeremie.

Her plans quickly changed.

Wolf and her longtime friend and partner Cherie Severe, a nurse and native of Haiti, joined up with aid group Relief International in Florida on Monday, and flew to the Dominican Republic, where they were ultimately transported via helicopter to Port-au-Prince.

"It's not a cliché to say that one's life can change in an instant," writes Wolf on her blog. "And for this country and this people, that instant came one week ago. The needs are so great and the destruction so vast, it boggles the mind. All I can think is, how can we best help and how will they (and we) rebuild?"

The team from Relief International and Wolf and Severe set up a medical clinic around Severe's Port-au-Prince house Wednesday, and they've been there ever since, according to Wolf's mother, Virginia Wolf of Monroe.

Virginia Wolf said her daughter alone saw close to 70 patients on Thursday, and that Relief International recently received a large shipment of medical supplies that should help doctors tend to the seemingly endless flow of the injured, whose numbers have been estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands.

At her blog, friendsforhealthinhaiti.wordpress.com, Wolf writes of seeing the capital city of the country that's become her home reduced to piles of debris.

"Today, Tuesday, four of us headed out into the city to look for pockets of people who had been displaced by the earthquake damage. We also got our first look at the fallen buildings and saw first-hand the incredible destruction," she wrote. "A few weeks ago, we had driven past the palace and all the government

buildings downtown. Today, the vast majority of them were reduced to rubble. An artisan shop where I had bought some crafts and paintings last month had fallen over the side of a hillside."

"The smell of death was all around -- a pungent reminder of what lay beneath the piles of rubble where once had been homes and schools and churches and businesses," she continued.

The clinic Wolf is helping to build in the mountains, which has received funds from the Presbytery of New Brunswick and a number of local churches, appears to have sustained little damage.

But Wolf said that in the wake of the earthquake, the need is more urgent than ever.

"We expect that a lot of people will migrate out into the country areas from Port-au-Prince, which will create a significant strain on all the health care facilities like ours. So, we're hoping we can get our permanent clinic building built soon, so we can expand our staff and services," she wrote in an email.

Both Wolf and her mother said her work in Haiti has evolved from her almost lifelong desire to practice medicine in some of the world's most impoverished places.

"Basically, I grew up always wanting to be a missionary doctor overseas," said Wolf, who first visited Haiti in college as part of a missionary trip.

Virginia Wolf, who has visited Haiti numerous times, said it was evident her daughter was hooked after that first trip, and she said it was no surprise that her daughter rushed down to aid earthquake relief efforts.

"Having made that early contact in Haiti, that's where she decided to spend her life," she said.

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