

Medical Specialists Mount International Effort

Medical Specialists Mount International Effort to Restore Critical Epilepsy Services in Haiti

Disruption in Clinical Care Increases Risk of Injury and Fatality Among Seizure Patients

Montreal, Canada and West Hartford, CT, January 27 – The international community of epilepsy specialists is providing financial support and specialized medical equipment contributed by its manufacturer to help re-establish services to epilepsy patients in Haiti halted by the devastating earthquake. In addition to providing long-term support needed to maintain normal clinical services, the project organizers' initial goal is to assist in preventing neurological damage and potential risk of death from break-through seizures that might occur when patients have lost or used up all of their anticonvulsant medication.

Leading the effort are the International League Against Epilepsy and its North American branches, the American Epilepsy Society and Canadian League Against Epilepsy. Their goal is also to assure that clinical services are available to diagnose and treat any cases of post-traumatic epilepsy that might result from head trauma sustained in the earthquake. Ten to thirty-five percent of people who experience severe head injuries (defined as a Glasgow scale of less than 9) will develop epilepsy, sometimes months or years later.

The Port-au-Prince Epilepsy Clinic, which has treated more than 1,000 patients with epilepsy in its first 18 months, was re-opened on January 25th. As of this week it has treated 80 patients per day, which is more than ten times its regular case load. In the immediate crisis, healthcare providers at the clinic have worked at the local university hospital helping to care for the severely injured. The medical focus in Haiti is now being turned to specialty care.

Staff at the Port-au-Prince Epilepsy Clinic plan to resume the provision of epilepsy care using the former clinic site and playground of a neighboring school. They report that the destruction of local pharmacies has created an urgent need for epilepsy medications. Even if the drugs were available, the campaign organizers say, epilepsy patients in Haiti, for whom medications are an economic hardship to begin with, are now even less able to afford them. In addition to aiding clinic reconstruction and equipment replacement, support from the professional epilepsy organizations and their members is going toward the purchase of medications for distribution to the clinic's epilepsy patients.

Lionel Carmant, M.D., of the University of Montreal, is coordinating the international effort of support for the clinic. "We hope that the pharmaceutical companies will also help," he said, "and join us in alleviating the drug shortage by their donation of anticonvulsants for distribution to a patient population that has already suffered so much." Dr. Carmant, who is Haitian, heads the epilepsy clinic and program of epilepsy research at Saint Justine Hospital in Montreal.

Astro-Med, Inc., the manufacturer of electronic medical instrumentation and other specialty equipment, has already contributed a portable EEG system. The portable system is urgently needed to provide clinical services in the field, as few patients can now get to the clinic.

Everett V. Pizzutti, Astro-Med president, said, "Our hearts go out to the people of Haiti. We are pleased to help in the recovery effort with the donation of this critically important diagnostic tool."

Contributions in support of the special campaign to assist the Port-au-Prince Epilepsy Clinic (la Clinique d'épilepsie de Port-au-Prince) can be made by visiting the AES website – aesnet.org – or by mailing donations to: American Epilepsy Society, 342 North Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06117-2507.

<https://www.aesnet.org/go/haiti>

About ILAE

The International League Against Epilepsy, founded by a group of international neurologists in Budapest in 1909, is a global professional non-profit international organization, and a non-governmental organization in official relations with the World Health Organization.

The ILAE objectives are to advance and disseminate knowledge about epilepsy; promote research, education and training; and improve services and care for patients, especially by prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

The American Epilepsy Society, based in West Hartford, CT, and Canadian League Against Epilepsy, based in London, ON, are members of the ILAE North American Commission.

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