

Navy Surgeon General Discusses the Navy's Role in Humanitarian Assistance at Howard University

By: Cmdr. Cappy Surette

WASHINGTON (NNS) -- The Navy surgeon general discussed the importance of the Navy's role in providing needed humanitarian assistance in Haiti April 27 at Howard University's Health Care Symposium. The symposium entitled "The Health Care Discussion: People, Environment, and Policy" brought together the top scholars, policy makers and activists to discuss health care issues.

Navy Surgeon General Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson Jr. began his keynote address by commending the teaching staff at Howard University for their service.

"You are also to be commended for your commitment to teaching and serving these students through your leadership and mentorship," said Robinson. "Make no mistake, teaching is Service. Just like our armed forces pledge an oath to serve their country in uniform, you have also made a pledge by having made a commitment to serve these students through your teaching."

Robinson focused on the theme of service throughout the speech and said it was the Navy's Medicine role to provide service to those in need around the world.

"From deploying doctors, nurses, and corpsmen to the battlefield to responding to humanitarian disaster, we support a wide range of missions all across the world, while at the same time taking care of our Sailors and Marines and their families here at home," said Robinson. "With 59,000 people under my charge, I take this responsibility very seriously."

Robinson provided an overview of Navy Medicine's role in Haitian relief including an overview of the Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort's key role in the humanitarian assistance operation called "Operation Unified Response."

"Nowhere have I been more proud of military medicine's achievements in recent memory, than in regards to the extraordinary work we just accomplished in Haiti," said Robinson. "When the earthquake hit our Haitian brothers and sisters, our hospital ship Comfort was deployed and heading towards Port-Au-Prince within 76 hours which was in record time."

While in Haiti, Comfort treated 871 patients and performed 843 surgeries. Soon after arriving on station, Comfort was receiving patients every six to nine minutes during its first four days and had more than 540 critically-injured patients on board within the first 10 days. During this initial phase of its mission, the Navy hospital ship ran 10 operating rooms at full capacity to care for injured Haitian, American and other foreign national earthquake victims requiring surgical care. This deployment marked the first time the ship reached full operational capacity, utilizing all operating rooms and beds, since it was delivered to the Navy in 1987.

"Our response to the Haitian people shows the selfless character of our Nation, and shows our values of caring for others less fortunate," said Robinson. "By doing so whether in Haiti or

elsewhere, we save lives in the short term, but we also provide the conditions for greater security and stability in the long term.”

Joseph P. Reidy, Ph.D., Associate Provost of Howard University thanked Robinson for speaking at the first symposium sponsored by the Howard University Initiative on Democracy, Markets, Communication, and Technology.

“It was critically important that this new think tank bring together an outstanding line-up of participants in its first symposium,” said Reidy. “Robinson communicated a wealth of knowledge from his many years of experience grappling with the issues of public health on a global scale and we are grateful to him for sharing his unparalleled insights.”

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