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**'We need chainsaws';
Hospital alliance continues Puerto Rico relief effort;
Local doctor has father and husband there now**



Chief Executive Officer of Regional General Hospital of Williston Edith Mears (left), RGH Chief Operating Officer Tillman Mears, and Dr. Charlene D'Acosta, rural health clinic director and medical doctor practicing general medicine in Williston, stand with some of the smaller boxes going to Puerto Rico. The supplies at RGH now are filling some of the hallways and rooms of one of the manufactured homes type of structures on the hospital's campus.

Photo by Jeff M. Hardison, All Rights Reserved

By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 30, 2017 at 11:17 a.m.

WILLISTON -- Dr. Charlene D'Acosta, clinical director, in conjunction with Regional General Hospital in Williston, is helping to lead an effort to provide some relief to the people of Puerto Rico.

Regional General Hospital is part of the National Alliance of Rural Hospitals (NARH), which began a private effort to aid the people suffering from the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and Hurricane Irma on that island.

Dr. D'Acosta, a practicing medical doctor at RGH, is a native of Puerto Rico. Her husband Dr. Charlie Canalesa is a non-practicing medical doctor and her father Dr.

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Ruben D'Acosta is a medical doctor as well.

Dr. Charlene D'Acosta chose to keep her maiden name when she married; hence, her husband has a different last name.

Both her husband and her father are on the island now, although she would prefer that they evacuate to the mainland of the United States. She intimated that they are being a bit too manly for their own good.

Many hospitals are closed on the island now. There is no electricity except by generators. Millions of people are seeking water and food.

"We need chainsaws," Dr. Charlene D'Acosta said. "We need medical supplies."

During a spontaneous interview late Friday afternoon (Sept. 29), the doctor said there are 200-plus boxes of water ready to go. There are 14 huge boxes of canned food ready to go.

She plans to spend 48 hours in Puerto Rico, but then she must return home to care for her two children and to continue her medical practice.

Dr. D'Acosta said she began her effort to start preparing for hurricane relief before Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. She has seen what hurricanes do. This is the worst, though.

She has spoken with some people on the island. They knew what they see around them, but they do not know that the entire island has been decimated.

"I have a mayor who wants me to get him a satellite phone," she said. "I just started this little effort from the hospital."

The doctor said she cannot say that the relief supplies will go out on Monday (Oct. 2), because this is a very fluid venture. There are many moving parts. However, she has seen people from all over Florida and beyond seeking to assist in the NARH relief effort.

The telephone number for NARH is 352-222-0000.

Another method to contact NARH President Mike Murtha, is to send an email to mmurtha@ruralhospitalalliance.com.

USCG Efforts Continue

Department of Homeland Security special agents arrive in Christiansted, Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands on Friday (Sept. 29) aboard the United States Coast Guard 154-cutter Winslow Griesser to deliver relief supplies and provide security to the U.S. Territory. The USCG is working with federal agencies around-the-clock to help bring relief to storm-ravaged areas.



USCG Photo by Senior Chief Petty Officer Zach Zubricki

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Coast Guard Investigative Service agents and Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team-South crewmembers work together with the Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency and members of local police, fire and government to distribute disaster relief supplies, food rations and water in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, Thursday, Sept. 28.

U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Flores

Incoming Puerto Rican students are eligible for free school meals

By the Press Office of Adam Putnam Published Sept. 30, 2017 at 11:17 a.m.

TALLAHASSEE – In response to the ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico and in preparation for an influx of evacuees, Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam H. Putnam is working with Florida schools to remind them that incoming Puerto Rican students displaced by Hurricane Maria can access free school meals through the National School Lunch Program.

Federal laws allow students in households evacuating a designated disaster area access to free school meals.

“Our neighbors and fellow Americans in Puerto Rico need all the help and support we can provide,” Putnam said. “To any families fleeing Puerto Rico and coming to Florida, you will not have to worry about how you’re going to pay for your child’s school meals.”

Parents or guardians looking for additional info can contact the department at 1-800-504-6609 or InfoFNW@FreshFromFlorida.com.