



USNS COMFORT – Enduring Promise 2018

October 10 – November 11, 2018

The United Nations reports that more than 2.3 million Venezuelans have left their country since the beginning of 2015, creating a large-scale humanitarian crisis and overburdening the health infrastructure in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Brazil. Shortages of medicine and food have contributed to malnourishment and a resurgence of diseases such as measles, diphtheria, and malaria as well as a rise in infant and maternal mortality.

Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Center for Global Health (CGH) Global Disaster Response (GDR) received a



request in August 2018 to support a mission with the United States Naval Ship (USNS) Comfort, a non-commissioned naval hospital, to provide clinical care to those affected by this crisis and assist in decompressing the health care systems of neighboring nations.

A specialized team comprised of Team Leader Lindsey Martin, NP (CGH, Blake 12 ICU), Kristen Wilson, RN (Ellison 3 PACU, Ellison 4 SICU), Kim Waugh, RN (Pediatrics) and Amanda Tetreault, PT (Sports Medicine) was sent to augment Navy clinical staff and non-military personnel aboard the USNS Comfort. The MGH team embarked for the 32-day mission on October 10, 2018 and provided direct clinic care both aboard the ship and at land-based medical sites in Peru and Ecuador.

"MGH GDR has historically provided a response to those affected by sudden onset disaster such as hurricanes or earthquakes. It is also part of our mission to respond to more chronic but equally compelling humanitarian emergencies," Team Leader Lindsey Martin said. "Joining the mission aboard the USNS Comfort gave my team the opportunity to fulfill this part of our mission and provide a medical response to people in crisis in our own hemisphere. "

The MGH team's response represents a tremendous effort on behalf of the volunteers, their families, colleagues, supervisors, directors, and managers to help those affected by this crisis. Their participation in this mission would not have been possible without the generous support of the Durant Fellowship for Refugee Medicine.



Amanda Tetreault, PT, above, the newest member of the GDR roster, shared the following account:

"This was my first mission with the group and as a physical therapist. It took roughly 10 days of travel on the ship to reach our first destination in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. The physical therapy team was able to see roughly 20-30 patients daily. Diagnoses included chronic pain, difficulty walking from arthritis and previous injury, cerebral palsy, Zika-related symptoms, traumatic paralysis and overuse syndromes.

One case that stands out was a boy with cerebral palsy and intellectual disability. He was 7 years-old and being carried in by his mother. She was clearly uncomfortable as she struggled to bring him into the clinic in an elementary school. She mentioned that her son had received some therapy, but they couldn't afford it anymore. He had never used an ankle-foot brace, nor did he have a stroller; she had been carrying him his whole life. With no pediatrics, we were unable to provide any bracing for his small legs and wrists, nor did we have strollers. We managed to rig a wheelchair with stretching straps for a seatbelt that allowed him to be transported by his mom. We also taught his mother techniques to stretch him at home too and prevent further spasticity of his limbs. It was a memorable patient encounter. I look forward too many more missions with MGH GDR, where I can utilize my skills to benefit those in need."