

Two area teams bringing aid to Honduras

Disease spreads after hurricane

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SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras — While the world's attention is focused on Kosovo, a group from Cincinnati remembers Honduras.

The first of two teams from the University of Cincinnati and its non-profit partner Shoulder to Shoulder Inc., arrived Saturday for an extensive two-week relief mission to help a country still limping from the thrashing of Hurricane Mitch.

Another team will arrive next weekend, bringing the total number of doctors, students, nurses and volunteers to about 60.

Following up on tons of aid already sent to Honduras from Greater Cincinnati, this team expects to treat up to 10,000 patients sick with malaria, cholera, malnutrition and other diseases spreading in the wake of the hurricane. Relief workers will also build houses and deliver food from Greater Cincinnati.

"My emotions slip between being excited and humbled by the challenge to do everything we have planned," said Wayne Waite, president of Shoulder to Shoulder and a lawyer from the Dayton area.

Hurricane Mitch killed more than 5,600 people and left 1.4 million homeless in Honduras, the worst of the Central American countries affected when the storm tore through in late October and early November. About 9,000 people were killed in the region.

Leaders of Cincinnati organizations say they are not concerned the crisis in Kosovo will divert donations from Honduras.

"The needs in Kosovo are great and the needs in Honduras are great," said Dr. Jeffery Heck, director of Shoulder to Shoulder as well as the UC Family Medicine Residency & International Health Programs.

"And those of us who are in the top 1 percent of the world's population in wealth and resources ought to be generous. We have the ability to (help) both."

The teams will visit two northwest towns, San Jose and Urraco,

which are in the northern state of Yoro.

"From what we understand, the area where we're going has not yet been helped by any outside group," Dr. Heck said. "We went where they government told us the need was the greatest."

Honduras was put on a national state of alert in December because of the epidemics spreading across the country.

"The impact of malaria is tremendous," Dr. Heck said.

The group hopes to treat cases of malaria, help the government tally statistics on how bad it is in that region and create programs to control mosquitoes, which transmit the disease.

The 60-member teams of physicians, medical students and residents in the UC Family Medicine international health program are three times as large as the medical brigades that travel to Honduras every six months.

The program has been sending brigades to Honduras for six years, since Dr. Heck and Shoulder to Shoulder established a clinic in the southwest town of Santa Lucia. The neighborhood around the clinic is called Barrio de Cincinnati.

This trip could result in more UC/Shoulder to Shoulder clinics in Honduras.

"If we see there needs to be a long-term relationship, whether housing or food or medical needs or medical personnel, than we'll do what it takes to help them," Dr. Heck said.

In November, Hondurans predicted the world would soon forget their plight. But even as donations for Kosovo consisting of winter clothes pour into the hands of a Shoulder to Shoulder partner, contributions for Honduras keep coming.

Loveland-based Matthew 25: Ministries, which has brought aid to Nicaragua since 1990, joined forces earlier this year with Shoulder to Shoulder.

"It opened up a real good opportunity for us to get into Honduras," Rev. Mettey said.

Since November, Shoulder to Shoulder has collected \$80,000 in donations, double what it gets in a normal year. Chiquita Brands International Foundation gave an additional \$20,000 for the organization's medical work in Honduras.

Within the past few weeks, Matthew 25: packaged and shipped seven semi-trailer containers — or 97 tons — of food, housing materials

and medical supplies to Honduras, said the Rev. Wendell Mettey, founder of Matthew 25: .

The goods — donated or bought with contributions by Greater Cincinnati residents and businesses — were sent down ahead of the UC/Shoulder to Shoulder teams.