

## AAP, others reach out to Puerto Rico after devastating hurricane

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As a collapsed electrical system and shortage of basic supplies devastate Puerto Rico, the Academy and its members are among those offering support, both on and off the island. But big challenges remain after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico on Sept. 20.

“Our economy is paralyzed because of the lack of power,” said Yasmin Pedrogo, M.D., FAAP, president of the 200-member AAP Puerto Rico Chapter. Most doctors’ offices and some hospitals on the island are closed or only partly functional. The chapter is continuing to assess the effects of the hurricane on members’ practices and homes.

Meanwhile, area pediatricians, pediatric residents and medical students are assisting in communities and in some of the shelters. Volunteer physicians and medical centers from the mainland, including the Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in Miami, have provided services and supplies, and community volunteers are stepping up to donate time and transportation.

At press time, authorities still had not reached some communities in the mid-portion of the island because heavy debris has blocked the areas. Overall, at least 50 people have died, and there were 76 cases of suspected and confirmed leptospirosis.

In addition, influenza and diarrhea are top concerns, according to Dr. Pedrogo, who serves as acting curriculum office director, clinical skills center director and associate professor of the Department of Pediatrics at University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine. Getting water and other basics to children and pregnant women are priorities. In a report to the Academy, Dr. Pedrogo noted that “thousands of children are drinking no potable water, from creeks that could be contaminated.”

The medical community in Puerto Rico developed handouts for parents on identification of medical conditions resulting from a disaster and how to manage conditions like diarrhea, fever, conjunctivitis and pediculosis.

Basic items are being provided to families, including Pedialyte for hydration, over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen, food and water. However, they still need all types of supplies, said Dr. Pedrogo.

The Academy has taken steps to help, including the following:



- A \$10,000 check was sent to the Puerto Rico Chapter from the Friends of Children disaster relief fund; hundreds of AAP members contributed.
- AAP staff helped expedite a donation of medical supplies to the chapter from Americares, a nongovernmental organization that specializes in emergency medical response.
- AAP President Fernando Stein, M.D., FAAP, sent a letter to Brock Long, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to urge the agency to provide needed relief, supplies, medication and other support to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- The Academy formed a workgroup to address issues on supporting children, families and pediatric colleagues in the above locations.
- The AAP Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council (DPAC) helped connect Puerto Rican colleagues with aid agencies like FEMA and Americares, and compiled a list of AAP members interested in helping with the recovery. DPAC also posted a Hurricane Response and Recovery page at <http://bit.ly/2gOnXsQ>.

There is concern that more pediatricians will leave Puerto Rico for the mainland if the crisis does not improve, Dr. Pedrogo acknowledged. But she is encouraged about the future.

“I think that we can continue working (on recovery efforts). We have the energy and basically Puerto Ricans are a very resilient people. ...We have hope,” she said, adding: “Thank you for the support for Puerto Rico, for the donations, for the messages — we really need your support and appreciate it.”