Delivering Hope:
Disaster Relief in Puerto Rico, Fall 2017

MedShare Responds

Following Hurricane Maria, the worst natural disaster to hit Puerto Rico in recorded history, MedShare launched its largest ever disaster relief response. In partnership with more than 20 healthcare and relief organizations, MedShare has donated over $552,000 in medical supplies, equipment, and emergency care items to communities across Puerto Rico. When entire towns were cut off from relief efforts, MedShare equipped medical teams to deliver aid. When healthcare professionals struggled to provide care, MedShare put supplies in their hands. When Puerto Rico was struggling, MedShare delivered hope.

As we watched Puerto Rico and neighboring Caribbean nations be battered by hurricane after hurricane, we knew that getting supplies to the islands would be difficult. Power wouldn’t be restored for months, airports were shut down for weeks, transit systems are still not fully operational, and shipping ports were backed up with the onslaught of deliveries trying to reach Puerto Rico. We knew we had a challenge ahead of us, but what we didn’t know was just how many friends and neighbors would reach out with ways to help.

As we worked to get emergency supplies to our partners on the ground, we discovered dozens of generous organizations and individuals eager to lend their time and resources to support those struggling in the wake of the hurricanes. Our partners at Jackson Healthcare donated their private jet to transport supplies to San Juan and evacuate a family in need back to the mainland. Film producer, Tyler Perry, donated his plane to MedShare and Patient Airlift Services so that we could deliver emergency medical supplies to Hospital Buen Samaritano in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. We partnered with UPS and The North American Jewish Federation to deliver 100 generators to organizations, patients, and families without power in Puerto Rico. We equipped 15 medical mission teams with the supplies they needed to care for patients in remote communities who were cut off from aid. And that was just the beginning.

Our relief efforts depend on the generosity and hard work of hundreds of individuals who come together to support our neighbors in need. Read on to learn how MedShare’s community has responded, rebuilt, and provided relief in Puerto Rico.

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www.medshare.org
The disasters that devastated the Caribbean and Gulf Coast this fall shocked us all. Seeing so many people lose everything, surviving for months without basic needs, was a wake up call. It brought far away individuals and communities closer together through compassion and generosity.

Dr. Carla Haack was one of those compassionate and generous individuals. Like many of us, she watched the news as Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. But as she watched and read reports of crippling infrastructure damage, widespread power outages, and patients going without treatment, she wasn’t just seeing a distant a place in need of aid, she was watching her home in devastation.

Dr. Haack grew up in Puerto Rico, moving there when she was 10 years old. She graduated from the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine in 2006 and moved to Atlanta. After becoming a well-respected surgeon at Emory, Dr. Haack wanted to give back. She started traveling with Emory Haiti Alliance, a MedShare-supported medical mission team that provides care to impoverished communities in Haiti.

On these trips, she’d worked in healthcare facilities without resources and treated patients in areas where hurricane damage took years to repair. But seeing those conditions in the place where she’d grown up was shocking. She couldn’t watch and wait.

Within two days of reaching out to MedShare, Dr. Haack was on her way to Rincon, Puerto Rico equipped with everything she needed to treat patients in crisis. Six other medical professionals and relief workers joined her as she made her way back home, carrying suitcases filled with primary care medical supplies from MedShare and a duffel bag full of donated medication.

During that first trip, Dr. Haack and her team spent a week providing treatment and performing minor surgeries to those in need. The supplies they received from MedShare enabled them to serve 350 patients on the western end of Puerto Rico. For many of those patients, Dr. Haack and her team were the first outside medical relief they’d seen since the hurricane hit weeks beforehand. Dr. Haack left Rincon reluctantly. A week hadn’t been nearly enough to treat all of the patients who came to her small clinic.

She returned to Puerto Rico a few weeks later, bringing with her another round of supplies from MedShare. This time, she visited Centro Medico in San Juan, a group of four hospitals in the capital that received the bulk of the patient referrals after Hurricane Maria. Despite the hospital having more resources than most facilities on the island, Dr. Haack shared stories of operating rooms plunging into darkness in the middle of surgery and healthcare professionals treating critically ill patients by flashlight. At one point, she was working with a group of 10 doctors who chose to share one twin bed in the on-call room for over a week. They stayed at the hospital rather than risk going home because, without fuel on the island, they were unsure if they would be able to return to treat their patients.

“I was both inspired and heartbroken to hear firsthand stories of how they continued to deliver patient care in the aftermath of the hurricane.”

Dr. Haack on the healthcare professionals she assisted at Centro Medico in San Juan
After Dr. Haack delivered supplies to Centro Medico, she moved on to Nuevo Atenas, an impoverished community on the southern coast of Puerto Rico. Only Dr. Haack’s words can do justice to the conditions she witnessed:

“To our heartbreak, two months after the hurricane, the residents of Nuevo Atenas told us that we were the first to come to their aid. Since the hurricane, residents have fended for themselves, in abysmal conditions, living in houses that have no roofs and are otherwise uninhabitable, with little food, no electricity and no clean water; among them, two cancer patients with colostomies. Their weariness was evident, but they have not given up.

I am satisfied to report that we were able to provide them with ostomy supplies sufficient for several months, thanks to the continuing generosity of people like you. We delivered food, water filtration systems, solar lights, clothing, medication, and other essential supplies to the entire community. As the only physician on the team, I provided medical attention to approximately 50 patients during the single day of clinic. While we stayed as long as we could, when it was time to leave, there were still people arriving in the hopes of receiving medical attention. Knowing this strengthened my resolve to return to Nuevo Atenas with more help.”

And that’s exactly what she did. Dr. Haack returned to MedShare shortly after Christmas to pick up more supplies -- the largest amount yet -- in preparation for her third relief trip to Puerto Rico. She spent the New Year in Puerto Rico, providing medical treatment to those who still need care, even this long after the storm.

As she sent her heartfelt gratitude for our donations of medical supplies, Dr. Haack also reminded us of the conditions many Puerto Ricans are still facing: “Despite all that we have accomplished, there is still much more to be done. ...There are many communities where, like Nuevo Atenas, help has yet to arrive. We must redouble our efforts to ensure these families and individuals receive the assistance they so desperately need.”

Dr. Haack and her team treat patients in Puerto Rico.
Supporting communities in times of uncertainty and crisis is one of the goals of our Disaster Relief Program. Uncertainty and crisis were exactly what faced patients and families in Puerto Rico as they lived without power for months after Maria. Every healthcare community we spoke with described unimaginable conditions. Unreliable power and a lack of supplies were making quality care nearly impossible. They also reminded us that hospitals weren’t the only places where power outages put patients’ lives at risk. Without power in their homes, people in need of respiratory therapy couldn’t get daily treatment, dialysis machines were useless, medications couldn’t be refrigerated. Power wouldn’t be restored for months, and many people couldn’t wait that long.

As MedShare searched for solutions, we found them in The North American Jewish Federation. The group donated 200 generators to MedShare’s relief efforts in the Caribbean; 100 to Puerto Rico, and 100 to St. Thomas. Thanks to generous support from UPS, we delivered the generators to our partners at the Jewish Community Center of Puerto Rico in San Juan, who distributed them to cancer patients, diabetes sufferers, a child welfare community center, and others in critical need of restored power. Those who received generators sent their heartfelt thanks to MedShare:

"Thank you for donating the generators to the Temple Beth Shalom community. My family has been very grateful because we have been without electricity since Hurricane Irma, and when Hurricane Maria struck, everyone in Puerto Rico has been affected. Not only did I receive a generator, but so did my aunt and uncle. My aunt is diabetic, has high blood pressure, and needs to keep her insulin in the refrigerator. It has not been easy. But your support and that of the TB community gives me strength to overcome the situation we, and all of Puerto Rico, find ourselves in.”
- Ana Ivonne O’Neil

“I would like to say thank you for the gift of the generator. Thanks to it I have been able to use the washing machine and I have been able to share it and provide light to various neighbors. It has been a great help in these moments of uncertainty.”
- Angel Rojas

“I have been using the generator since the first day I received it. Two weeks ago I had an asthmatic condition...your support gives me strength to overcome the situation we, and all of Puerto Rico, find ourselves in.”
- Ana Ivonne O’Neil, San Juan Puerto Rico
for which I needed to give myself daily therapy with a machine. The generator was a big help, I would say a blessing. I am personally grateful for the donation to whomever so kindly came to our help.”
- Margarito Otero

“We are a family of modest means that lives in Arecibo, P.R. We live near Utuado, P.R. Utuado was one of the most damaged city because of the Hurricane Maria. We are in a rural zone and our community is, at this moment, without water, internet or power. For us, the power generator was such a great blessing, we are trying to recover normality! 57 days and normality seems to be far...You do not want to be at our house without energy... our neighborhood seems like a deep cave... but we feel blessed. We are very thankful, we’re blessed to have a community that supports us and does goods things! From the bottom of our hearts: thank you for your support!”
- Rebecca Román and family

Families, patients, and community organizations in Puerto Rico were overjoyed at the arrival of MedShare-donated generators. Restored power allowed them to receive medical care, support their neighbors, and begin the long process of recovery after the worst natural disaster to ever hit the island.
Disaster Relief Timeline: Puerto Rico

**September 10**
Hurricane Irma makes landfall.

**September 20**
- Hurricane Maria makes landfall.
- MedShare initiates Disaster Relief Protocol for Hurricane Maria impacted areas.

**September 21**
MedShare initiates Disaster Relief Protocol for Hurricane Irma impacted areas.

**September 22**
MedShare equips DeltaCares with $1,500 in medical supplies for patient recovery in Puerto Rico.

**September 29**
- Thanks to Tyler Perry donating his plane, MedShare and Patient Airlift Services deliver $4,700 in emergency medical supplies to Hospital Buen Samaritano in Puerto Rico.

**October 4**
- MedShare delivers $35,000 in medical supplies to Centro Medico, San Juan's main hospital. Centro Medico experienced severe power outages; surgeons performed operations by flashlight and doctors lived at the hospital in order to look after their patients.
- MedShare delivered 100 generators to the Jewish Community Center of Puerto Rico, allowing patients and community members to gain power for the first time since Maria hit.

**October 5**
MedShare equips Dr. Carla Haack with $600 in emergency care supplies for her first medical relief trip to Puerto Rico. Dr. Haack treated more than 350 patients with MedShare supplies in less than a week on the island.

**October 19**
- MedShare delivers $9,000 in medical supplies to Iglesia Episcopal Diocesus de Puerto Rico.
- MedShare equips Lig Global Foundation with more than $1,000 in medical supplies for Puerto Rico relief.
**October 25**
MedShare delivers its second donation to Centro Medico in San Juan, Puerto Rico. This air shipment of more than $45,000 in medical supplies allows San Juan’s largest functioning hospital to continue treatment for critically ill patients and reach people who haven’t received care since Hurricane Maria hit.

**November 3**
MedShare equips Tabernaculo Rey de Gloria with $2,200 of medical supplies for relief efforts in Arroya, Puerto Rico.

**November 9**
Dr. Carla Haack picks up supplies for her second trip to Puerto Rico. On this trip, she supplies hospitals in Puerto Rico with supplies, allowing them to provide treatment despite power outages. She also travels to rural areas where communities still haven’t received medical aid, now nearly two months after the storm.

**November 15**
MedShare delivers $3,500 in emergency medical supplies to RN Response Network and Nurses United in Puerto Rico.

**November 30**
- MedShare delivers $10,000 in emergency supplies to Instituto Tercera Mision in Puerto Rico.
- MedShare delivers $2,800 of emergency relief supplies, including equipment for collecting safe drinking water, to Fundación Jesús Saad Nazer in Puerto Rico.

**December 4**
MedShare makes its second delivery to RN Response Network and Nurses United in Puerto Rico. More than $4,000 in medical supplies support their patient care in Puerto Rico.

**December 6**
MedShare delivers $57,000 in emergency relief supplies to Warrior Angel Rescue in Puerto Rico as they support hurricane-damaged communities.
Disaster Relief Timeline: Puerto Rico, continued

December 7
MedShare delivers more than $108,000 in medical supplies to ADRA in Puerto Rico. These supplies equip Bella Vista Hospital in Mayaguez and more than 330 rural clinics.

December 11
MedShare delivers more than $109,000 in medical supplies to equip healthcare professionals struggling to treat patients at Hospital Español Auxilio Mutuo de Puerto Rico.

December 27
MedShare equips Dr. Carla Haack with supplies for her third medical relief trip to Puerto Rico.

2018
MedShare continues to provide medical relief to communities in need. We are working with our partners on the ground to help Puerto Rico rebuild and recover over the next several years.