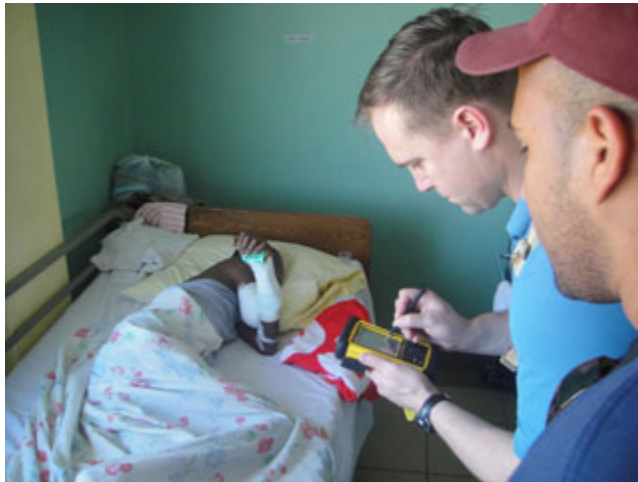


Using Technology to Help Haiti's Growing Amputee Population

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by Karlie Pouliot



Global Relief Technologies
Adam Cote, senior vice president of Global Relief Technologies, uses a PDA to collect crucial information from amputees.

Long before the catastrophic 7.0-magnitude earthquake devastated Haiti last month, amputees living in the Caribbean nation faced a grim and uncertain future with many people looking at them as no more than an economic burden. And now, because of the nature of the injuries sustained by thousands of people in the quake, the country is dealing with a whole new “generation of amputees,” according to one Haitian doctor.

In the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, one-legged people on crutches are already a frequent sight — many of them young — who will need expensive care that was virtually unavailable even before the quake hit the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. But now, organizations around the globe are working to change that. One of them is Global Relief Technologies (GRT) based in Portsmouth, N.H., which dispatched a team to Haiti in cooperation with [New England Brace Company](#) and the non-profit organization, [Healing Hands for Haiti](#), which has been providing [medical care](#) to patients in the country for more than a decade.

“Most important in any crisis situation is getting information from ‘boots on the ground’ to decision makers who can influence the proper deployment of personnel and resources,” Adam Cote, senior vice president of Global Relief Technologies and Haiti relief team leader told FoxNews.com. “We’re going down there to do personal health needs assessments, which is crucial for these amputees.”

By using GRT’s technology, relief workers will be able to collect critical information from each patient that will be uploaded to a handheld personal digital assistant (PDA). That information will include their name, location, age, date of amputation, type of amputation, as well as a photo of the injury. The patient will also be given a bracelet that contains a barcode, so they can be easily identified. Once all of the information is collected, it’s transmitted to the company’s control center in N.H. where it’s distributed to other organizations, including New England Brace Company, so they can begin working on fitting prosthetics to amputees immediately.



“We wish this technology was used during Hurricane Katrina,” Cote said. “The first time it was used by the [Red Cross](#) was during Hurricane Ike and Gustav. In a matter of days, they did over 30,000 health assessments with only 15 PDAs. So, this is really changing the way first responders and humanitarian assistance relief organizations can respond to crisis situations.”



As of Monday, Cote and his team had personally conducted detailed assessments on more than 100 amputees in the Port-au-Prince area.

“We have three of the largest hospitals that are sending us their medical records on several hundred more amputees,” Cote said. “When we see these records, we can confirm their numbers, but one hospital told us they had 225 amputee records, another said over 300 and the third simply said they had ‘a lot.’”

Estimates of amputees in Haiti have varied greatly in the days following the earthquake, with some organizations putting the number in the tens of thousands, while others have come in much lower.

“I’ve talked to many doctors down here and different agencies and nobody truthfully knows how many amputees there are,” Cote said. “Everyone is guessing.”

The most recent numbers from Handicap International, an international non-government agency working in Haiti, estimates there are more than 2,000 amputees with that number expected to grow. In a news release on the agency’s Web site, officials said the situation in Haiti is unprecedented.

“This is due to the sheer number of the injured — 250,000 people according to the U.N. — and the destruction of health facilities,” Thomas Calvot, a specialist in the care management of earthquake victims at Handicap International said. “In emergency situations, doctors often have no other choice but to amputate. In Haiti, no organization is in a position to cover all the needs in this area. We are already working with partner organizations in order to take care of the maximum number of injured people in a coordinated manner,” he added.



Cote and his team had a coordination meeting with the agency Monday morning.

“Handicap International is taking the lead on the amputee treatment program down here,” he said. “They want to use our technology to keep track of all the amputees so they can start providing them with prosthetics and rehabilitation. They want to track the patients from the beginning.”



In addition to the health assessments, Cote and his team have taken approximately 750 “damage assessments” of structures that were destroyed in the quake primarily in the cities of Port-au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel – the hardest hit areas. They have also agreed to visit area hospitals to get a bed count along with information pertaining to the facility’s capabilities including the number of staff members, and the ability to perform surgeries

“I’ve never seen anything like this with respect to infrastructure and also casualties to the civilian population on such a large scale,” Cote said. “The number of casualties and injuries are enormous. Hospitals in the Port-au-Prince area are overflowing.”

Cote said he expects teams from GRT to have a

presence in Haiti for at least the next several months due to the imperative need to collect information about exactly what damage has been done to the Caribbean nation's infrastructure and its population.

"You can look and see how bad it is from a micro perspective, but to start rebuilding on a massive scale, you need planning. And to do that, you need accurate information, which we are providing."