Aftershocks

Following a devastating January earthquake, Haiti's HIV community struggles to rebuild.

June 23, 2010 By Willette Francis

On January 12, a massive earthquake struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti, destroying the capital city and many Haitians' lives. An estimated 217,000 people were killed, about 300,000 were injured, and more than 1 million were displaced.

Individuals, communities and international organizations have since come to Haiti's aid, including UNAIDS, the William J. Clinton Foundation, AmeriCares, the M·A·C AIDS Fund, Aid for AIDS International and Housing Works.

But many advocates argue that the Caribbean country's HIV-positive population hasn't received enough specific attention during the rebuilding process. Some of the challenges they have faced include care and treatment interruptions, lack of access to clean water and no way to properly store their meds.

Esther Boucicault, president of PHAP+, a Haitian AIDS coalition, says that many people and members of her organization have been displaced or misplaced since the earthquake.

"There [has been] no support [for] or attention paid to people living with HIV/AIDS specifically," she tells POZ. "Many of them have been traveling in the countryside and provinces, and nobody is aware of where they might be. [We don't] know if they died or passed away after the earthquake or if they have been somewhere else with their families in the countryside," says Boucicault, who is recognized as the first person in Haiti to publicly disclose her HIV-positive status when she appeared in radio and television ads in 1998.

"The Haitian government [itself] has not provided anything [specific] for people living with HIV/AIDS," she continues. "[All of it] has come from abroad. We are concerned because if the donors stop providing aid to Haiti, how are people living with HIV/AIDS going to keep staying alive?"

To read our full interview with Boucicault, search "Haiti in Waiting" on poz.com.

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