

**Feb. 7, 2010: Kansas City infoZine**

## **U.S. DOCTORS TO CONNECT WITH HAITIAN PATIENTS VIA TELEMEDICINE**

By **Nikki Roberti**

**WASHINGTON, D.C., Feb. 7, 2010 – infoZine/Scripps Howard Foundation Wire** – A group of medical and technical experts is leaving for Haiti on Saturday to bring telemedicine to connect victims of the earthquake to medical experts in the U.S. and Europe.

Thanks to a new technology about the size as a 35 mm camera, Haitians injured in last month's earthquake will be able to see medical experts from all over the United States and Europe.

A team of U.S. medical and technology experts is flying to Haiti on Saturday to set up the telemedicine gear that will allow medical specialists to consult on cases using cameras and the Internet.

"It's the first of its kind," said Dr. Keith Vrbicky, medical director of American Educational Telecommunications, of the new device.

Telemedicine uses cameras and the Internet to connect doctors with patients from anywhere in the world. The technology also allows doctors to listen to patients' hearts and lungs, Vrbicky said.

AET is one of nine U.S. international corporations involved in a mission for Haiti to use this technology as part of the medical aid for disaster response.

The mission, called HAITI 2010 Earthquake-Telemedicine/Disaster Behavioral Health Operation, will connect two cameras in Haiti to five U.S. hospitals, providing access to 250 medical specialists, said Allsion A. Sakara president of High Alert International.

High Alert International is sending its founder and chief executive officer, Dr. Maurice Ramirez, to Haiti with the cameras.

Disorganization is one of the largest problems in Haiti, Ramirez said. "Doctors and nurses poured in and had places to work but no materials or had materials but no places to work, and of course, there were patients everywhere," Ramirez said. Specialists have also self-deployed to contribute aid, but they aren't necessarily working in their fields of expertise, Ramirez said.

"There will be gynecologists seeing pediatric cases because they are going to help," he said. "But they are not necessarily seeing the patients they could optimally help."

Telemedicine has been in development since the 1990s, but the wireless capabilities have been introduced in the U.S. in last eight to 12 months through AET, Vrbicky said.

An earlier form of telemedicine was also used in disaster response in 2001 after an earthquake hit Kutch, Gujarat, in India, Sakara said. However, the technology ran into connection and bandwidth problems.

Those issues are not anticipated for the Haiti mission because wireless capabilities have improved since then, Vrbicky said. The group initially plans to stay in Haiti until March 19, but could stay longer. While two cameras are being used now, Sakara said it is possible more cameras could be brought to Haiti later.

"It's very exciting to see where things are going since the mid '90s to now," Sakara said. "And now things are mobile. It's wonderful."