



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**MAYOR MARK FARRELL AWARDS CERTIFICATES OF
HONOR TO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH TEAM
RETURNING FROM MEDICAL RELIEF MISSION
IN PUERTO RICO**

*Relief team spent eight days providing services to communities still without power from
Hurricane Maria*

San Francisco, CA— Mayor Mark Farrell today welcomed back a team from the Department of Public Health that took part in a medical relief mission in Puerto Rico. Mayor Farrell recognized the efforts of the DPH unit by awarding the group Certificates of Honor from the City.

“This group of individuals epitomize the best of San Francisco,” said Mayor Farrell. “While the federal administration has disgracefully ignored the humanitarian tragedy in Puerto Rico, this collection of selfless medical professionals displayed true compassion while delivering critical services to struggling communities. In San Francisco, we do not look the other way when confronted with suffering—we pour our heart into helping those in need.”

The DPH team comprised a group of 14 Spanish-speaking doctors, nurses and mental health providers who spent eight days in April in the northwestern part of Puerto Rico, in Hatillo and Utuado, where the damage from Hurricane Maria has left residents without water and power, seven months later.

“Emergency response is part of the responsibilities of Health Departments. Responding to Puerto Rico was a humanitarian effort from San Francisco,” said Barbara Garcia, San Francisco Health Director. “The Health Department has a lot of experience with emergency response, and we knew the lack of infrastructure in Puerto Rico after the storm was going to continue to make health conditions much more difficult. We went to help the community, care for patients and provide support to the clinical staff on site who have been working incredibly hard with no breaks for months. Recovery will be a long process for Puerto Rico, and we wanted to help the providers who are central to the response.”

The San Francisco team worked side by side with the staff of the local [Corporacion Servicios Medicos](#) (CSM), Federally Qualified Health Centers that include Clinica Hatillo and Clinica Utuado. The DPH team saw about 100 patients from April 6 – 14, by going out into the community and accompanying the CSM teams that have been doing this work daily since the storm.



Together, they trekked up mountains, waded through rivers and knocked on doors every day in tiny rural communities to ask people if they wanted to be seen by a medical team. They delivered care and medications, brought water and food, and even generators to help people who were still living without these basics of modern life.

“It was a life changing experience,” said Dr. Hali Hammer, DPH team leader and Director of Primary Care for the San Francisco Health Network. “To see how poor the infrastructure is and how little immediate support they had after the hurricane, and the lasting effects of that, some seven months later.”

Most of the patients were elderly people with poorly controlled chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and sleep apnea. These conditions were exacerbated by the storm, which kicked up dust and created mold, knocked out power used to refrigerate medications and cut off safe drinking water.

In addition to treating community members, the DPH behavioral health providers also worked with the clinic staff in Utuado, incredibly dedicated, hard-working people who hadn’t taken a moment to think about their own resilience and trauma during this experience.

San Franciscans who want to contribute to this life-saving work can make donations to the [Corporacion Servicios Medicos](#) (CSM) through the [San Francisco Public Health Foundation](#).

The DPH team comes from San Francisco Health Network locations across the city, including Tom Waddell Urban Health Center, Potrero Hill Health Center, Southeast Health Center, Castro-Mission Health Center, Shelter Health and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital. The team members included Dr. Hammer, team lead; Tobi Skotnes, logistics coordinator; Viva Delgado, logistics and medication/supply coordinator; nurses Evita Mullins, Richard Santana, Ellen Davis, Ramona Soberanis; doctors Ann Dallman, Raul Gutierrez, Alexis Williams, Kenneth Payan; licensed clinical social worker Nakari Ron; counselor Jesus Pizano; psychologist Dr. Ricardo Carrillo.

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