

Better coordinated health care needed to better serve Haitians post-earthquake

October 5 2013

Three years after an earthquake killed more than 200,000 people and left an estimated 1.5 million people homeless in Haiti, a Henry Ford Hospital study found that more mobilized medical care is necessary to bridge cultural and health care barriers and better serve the Haitian population.

Highlights of the study:

- 79 percent said their religious leader was their main source of health care information.
- 76 percent said they felt insecure in their ability to care for loved ones who are sick.
- 69 percent said Western medicine is less safe than traditional Haitian medicine.
- 58 percent said they never heard of dengue, an infectious tropical disease transmitted by mosquitos. Symptoms include fever and headache.
- 50 percent had or knew someone who contracted malaria.
- 30 percent said fever was their chief health complaint.

Samia Arshad, MPH, a Henry Ford Infectious Diseases epidemiologist and the study's lead author, related the story of a woman whose traditional healer diagnosed her pregnant, only to learn later at a health clinic that she had a tumor in her stomach.

"These results show that a more coordinated effort is needed to develop some standard guidelines to bring together the various efforts for

providing health care to the Haitian population, and to address gaps in prevention methods," Arshad says.

The study is being presented Saturday at the Infectious Diseases Society of America's annual meeting in San Francisco.

Henry Ford researchers sought to examine health-seeking behaviors, [medical care](#) utilization and vaccination prevalence.

The findings were compiled from health care surveys conducted by Henry Ford researchers during three medical mission trips to the country from June 2012 to January 2013. Researchers, with the aid of translators, surveyed 204 Haitians at 11 free health clinics in urban and rural areas. Other key findings:

- 28 percent said they or other family members went to the hospital when sick.
- 24 percent said they self-treated.
- On average, respondents visited a [health care](#) facility 4.6 times in the past six months.

Arshad said a large majority of respondents said vaccination is effective for preventing diseases, and either had their child or themselves vaccinated.

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

Citation: Better coordinated health care needed to better serve Haitians post-earthquake (2013, October 5) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-health-haitians-post-earthquake.html>

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