



God-given nursing opportunities in the midst of disaster

The beautiful islands of The Bahamas are located off the south east coast of Miami. This set of islands are well known for their stunning beaches, beautiful resorts and an incredibly gentle and kind people. Together they make a wonderful destination for worldwide travellers to relax and regenerate in an exclusive and luxurious pocket of the world.

Hurricane Dorian hits The Bahamas

On the 2nd September 2019, level 5 Hurricane Dorian arrived with full force, relentlessly delivering devastating and relentless storms to the islands of The Bahamas for two days, before moving out and dispersing. The storms reached wind gusts of over 297km/h, bringing associated storm surges and heavy rainfall which had an overwhelming and catastrophic impact.

As the world watched and waited, there was a group of people who set about getting help into this disaster scene as quickly as possible.



Samaritan's Purse Disaster and Responders Team



As a nurse, I signed up and was trained to be a part of a Disaster and Responders Team (DART) in the medical arm of Samaritan's Purse (SP). This organisation is headed by Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, and is based in Boone, California. It assesses and brings aid to outlying regions that have been affected by disaster.



I was contacted by SP while Hurricane Dorian was still destroying parts of Freeport and Abeco Island to ask of my availability and interest in serving in the soon to be erected Emergency Field Hospital. Within 48 hours I was on a plane from Sydney and heading towards The Bahamas. I flew on increasingly smaller planes to get to The Bahamas, with the final flight flying over a huge zone of mass destruction with piled-up cars, houses torn apart and debris of monumental proportions.



As I was driven out of the Freeport airport (which had become a sunken pool a few days earlier, but now the tarmac was clear with a simple pop-up tent as the office). We drove past ripped up hangars, overturned cars, avoiding bits of planes that littered the area which was full of splintered trees and debris.

Samaritan's Purse had set up an inflatable set of well-designed interconnecting tents which were already in full swing and operationally ready to take the place of the now condemned local hospital. The make-shift hospital was fully staffed by Samaritan's Purse doctors, nurses, logistics team, a lab technician and a pharmacist.



There was a Triage, Clinic, Emergency Room, ICU, Step Down Unit, Operating Room, Men's and Women's wards, X-ray facility, pharmacy and lab area. Most of us had never met each other before, yet we were brought together with the single purpose of serving these people to the best of our ability, founded firmly in God's love, strength and capacity.

What an extraordinary place for a nurse from Sydney to find herself in!





It was an incredible privilege to serve these people in the Emergency Room and the Women's and Children's Ward every day for a month, quickly researching different named medications, crossing cultural barriers, learning what is important to the Bahamian people and realising that I cannot recall a single person complaining about the Hurricane itself. This was a humbling thought as I toppled into bed each night.

The vision and mission behind SP is to set up the hospital, give the Bahamian staff weeks or months to find their feet and begin to come back to work as they are able.



Each day began with a short devotion, as patient care allowed, SP members would attend to pray for the day ahead and our service within it. Over 3-6 months the transition of rosters, lab work, bedside care and supplies is handed back to the local nationals. Every endeavour is made to make that transition as helpful and smooth as possible for them. The hospital, instruments, equipment, linen and supplies are left for their use as they require.

I feel very blessed to have seen how people from nations around the world gather, connect, equip and competently bring their skills and resources to those who have experienced natural disasters wherever they may be in the world.

Were there dreadful stories?

Yes. Yes. Yes. I listened to some of the most heart wrenching situations I have ever heard, while binding up the broken, wiping their tears and hugging the stranger God had gently placed before me in that hour. I understand there are still 1,200 people missing. It is feared they have been washed out to sea.

We had many days filled with trauma, sadness, loss and grief, but God shone through in ways that were louder than the storm winds, brighter than Dorian's darkest hours, and hopeful of better days to come. We joined with the Bahamian people to praise God with songs and Scripture verses deeply inscribed on our hearts as we fearlessly and unapologetically gave the glory to God for life, faith and love.





“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘**Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.**’ Matthew 25:37-40

Gabrielle Macaulay, 4 November, 2019