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Creating a Healthier Vieques

Preliminary assessment of needs and resources

By Jesse Lava of the American Values Network and Harvard University Hauser Center

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vieques has no shortage of health needs, with rates of cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and other conditions far exceeding those found in the rest of Puerto Rico. But it also has an abundance of resources — both inside and outside of the island — to combat these problems. I spent the summer of 2010 in Vieques researching these needs and resources, with an eye toward how the community might utilize its assets to improve the health of island residents.

In interviewing numerous people involved with health in Vieques, I have found seven key needs:

- More specialists to visit the island regularly, including ophthalmologists, oncologists, dermatologists, and cardiologists, among others.
- Better funding and resources at the Susana Centeno Health Center. This facility lacks myriad supplies, medications, and equipment. It also has no one to read x-rays and its maternity ward has been non-functional for nearly a year.
- More cooperation within the Vieques medical community, with better coordination among the island's private doctors, public health center, and activists.
- More attention to prevention and education, especially with youth.
- Better transportation options, since coming and going is inevitably time-consuming, expensive, or both.
- Stronger mental health services.
- More continuity and reliability, since changes in government bring upheaval to the health system and politics often stymies efforts to improve things.

The internal resources available to fill these gaps — that is, the resources that are in Vieques itself — include the following:

- Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, an advocacy group that plays a pivotal role in supporting various improvement efforts on the island.
- Vieques Women's Alliance, which did much to empower women during the struggle against the U.S. Navy and has several leaders associated with healthcare.
- Salud para Vieques, the vehicle by which free specialty clinics have come to Vieques in the past.
- The medical community, which includes family practitioners, dentists, and psychologists that are based in Vieques and interested in helping to improve health on the island.
- Emerging leaders that offer fresh perspectives and represent the future of activism in Vieques.

- The business community, especially hotels willing to give free housing to specialists that come to Vieques to give clinics.
- The religious community, including Catholic, Episcopal, and Methodist churches that have committed to assisting community health efforts.
- The municipality, which has funded transportation and food for specialty clinics.
- Assorted independent activists and groups-in-the-making.

External resources, located on the main island of Puerto Rico and mainland U.S., include:

- The American Values Network and Eaves Law Firm, which are working on the advocacy and legal fronts to bring more funding.
- Church groups, including the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, the United Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ, and the Ecumenical Coalition of Puerto Rico. These groups are willing to send specialist physicians to Vieques on a regular basis.
- University of Puerto Rico Medical School, with president Dr. Walter Frontera pledging to consider specific proposals for partnership and assistance.
- University of Puerto Rico School of Public Health, via Dr. Ramón Sanchez, who could give consultations (and perhaps direct help) on sexual health.
- Donors of equipment, supplies, and medication, including Medshare and Americares.
- U.S. Rep. Steve Rothman, who is about to introduce a bill that would create a world-class research facility and treatment center in Vieques.
- Federal 330 program, which gives health funding to underserved communities.
- Doctors that have done past clinics.
- Numerous additional prospects.

Given these needs and resources — as well the capacity of my organization, the American Values Network, to help — a plan has emerged to improve the health of island residents. It would involve the following components:

- Free clinics, with volunteer specialists coming in from Puerto Rico and the U.S.
- Education, so the incoming specialists can give prevention trainings to the general population and “continuing medical education” to the physicians based in Vieques.
- Follow-up, so that the same specialists return to Vieques regularly and discuss specific cases with local doctors (including recommendations for ongoing care).
- Advocacy, where incoming doctors could later serve as spokespeople on the issue to the media, Congress, and the courts.

Those already familiar with the Vieques situation and looking to skim this document for new information should focus on three sections: external resources, proposed plan, and next steps.

PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

Healthcare in Vieques, Puerto Rico, is in a state of crisis. Cancer levels, for instance, are 30% higher in Vieques than they are on Puerto Rico's main island. In the case of diabetes, that figure is 41%; for hypertension, a whopping 381%. And roughly 80% of residents test positive for heavy metals like lead, mercury, and arsenic in their hair. Something is seriously awry.

Still, positive steps are being taken. Perhaps most prominently, 7000 Vieques residents have filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Navy in the hopes of achieving relief. In addition, U.S. Congressman Steve Rothman of New Jersey is developing legislation that would fund better health services on the island.

To promote these measures, the American Values Network (AVN) has been working to raise awareness in the U.S. about the sad state of health in Vieques. A faith-based advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., AVN landed a two-part CNN story on Vieques in February 2010 and organized a conference on the island about four months later. It is also working with Congressman Rothman's office to help design and pass the Vieques legislation.

However, advocacy is a long-term proposition. The lawsuit has already been going on for about 10 years, and legislation is never a sure thing. Vieques needs help now. Accordingly, AVN wants to do what it can to provide that help while the legal process runs its course. AVN also hopes that as it provides assistance, it can recruit more American doctors to visit Vieques, see the health crisis firsthand, and then return to the U.S. mainland to serve as spokespeople. In other words, AVN hopes to make gains on both the service and advocacy fronts.

The American Values Network hopes to make gains in both service and advocacy.

As a summer organizer with AVN, I was charged with undertaking a project with the following components:

- 1) Researching the community's interests and needs on healthcare, mainly through interviews with residents and experts.
- 2) Using that information to develop a plan for improving the health of residents while cultivating a larger set of credible spokespeople for AVN's advocacy work.
- 3) Identifying community resources to advance the plan.

- 4) Identifying external resources to advance the plan.
- 5) Creating a written summary of the work (i.e., this document).

The summer has come to a close, but my work on the island is not finished. As a public policy student at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, I am planning to write my master's thesis on the subject of health in Vieques. In so doing, I will be able to continue working on this project with the American Values Network.

Special thanks go to the following individuals for their support in this project: Johanna Kreilick and everyone at the Hauser Center; my "Vieques braintrust," including Aika Shoo, Alexander Herman, Bethany Caruso, Charlie Clements, Jennifer DeLeon, Gaby Macz, Elodia Quevedo Macz, James Lava, Lois Miller, Luis Ticona, Mandy Gittler, Paige Austin, and Marshall Ganz; Eric Sapp of AVN; Bob Rabin and Nilda Medina for their generosity of time, effort, and spirit; and all of the other residents and supporters of Vieques, far too numerous to name, who have welcomed this gringo with open arms.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

There is no shortage of need in Vieques when it comes to health. Sadly, no real epidemiological study has been done on this island to lay out and quantify these needs — a fact lamented by academics who have done work in Vieques, including Dr. Cruz Maria Nazario of the University of Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, my interviews with community members have revealed an abundance of gaps in the Vieques health system. In no particular order, community members need:

1) More specialists. Generally speaking, medical specialists like cardiologists, oncologists, and dermatologists do not come to Vieques frequently. Residents must obtain specialty services on the main island of Puerto Rico. The trek to and from the main island by ferry and taxi — most commonly to Fajardo, Rio Piedras, Carolina, or San Juan — is long and burdensome, particularly for the elderly. The trip always takes at least one full day, frequently more, and is both financially and physically draining. Some Vieques residents consequently choose not to bother pursuing screenings (say, for cancer) or even necessary treatments for major illnesses.

Specialties in which services appear to be needed most include:

- Ophthalmology
- Oncology
- Dermatology
- Cardiology
- Internal medicine
- Gastroenterology
- Neurology
- Endocrinology
- Pneumology
- Psychiatry

Residents want specialists to do screening on heavy metals, vital organs, learning disabilities, respiratory diseases, and other things, as well as provide help with treatment, medication, and follow-up care.

To be sure, free clinics used to come regularly and frequently through a program organized by the mayor of Carolina and funded by the government of Puerto Rico. Carmen Valencia (through her organization, Salud para Vieques) was one of the key contacts for this program on Vieques. However, the program ended in 2006 after the mayor died, the central government changed parties, and public funding dried up. Since then, Valencia has successfully organized a number of clinics but has lacked the resources to ensure that they come in a systematic, reliable way. As a result, some residents have expressed concern that the specialists visiting Vieques lately have not provided the needed follow up. Moreover,

patients have reported not receiving the results of lab tests that specialists have performed and say that sometimes the specialists prescribe medication that cannot be obtained at the local pharmacy. A couple of the clinics have also been ill attended, apparently because the word never got out.

2) Better funding and resources for the main health center. The Susana Centeno Health Center is the hub of diagnosis and treatment in Vieques. Although it deals with all kinds of Viequenses, a disproportionate number of its patients are part of the Puerto Rican government's "Reforma" program, which funds healthcare for those with low incomes. The center provides services including:

- Emergency room
- Outpatient care (general medicine)
- Small amount of inpatient care (say, a bed with an IV for a few hours)
- Basic lab tests
- Basic medications (a few antibiotics, vitamins, and painkillers)
- Dialysis
- Pediatrics
- Ob-gyn (without births)

All else is referred to the main island, and most Vieques residents say the health center is not up to the task of serving the community's needs. The facility's problems include:

- Lack of supplies. According to staff (though without confirmation from top brass), the facility is in need of:
 - Wound dressings
 - Elastic bandages
 - Defibrillator
 - Blood pressure cuffs
 - Stethoscopes
 - Cloth bags
 - Hand/finger splints
 - Cervical collars
 - Knee braces/immobilizers,
 - Foot/ankle braces
 - Cast boots and shoes
 - Abdominal binders and rib belts
 - Shoulder/clavicle immobilizers

Key needs:

- 1) More specialists.
- 2) Better funding and resources at Susana Centeno Health Center.
- 3) More cooperation within the Vieques medical community.
- 4) More attention to prevention and education, especially with children.
- 5) Better transportation options.
- 6) Stronger mental health.
- 7) More continuity and reliability.

- Breathing circuits including pediatric arm boards, pediatric electrodes, pediatric emergency systems, pediatric ostomy, pediatric respiratory, and pediatric suction catheters
- Lack of medication. The health center now has only a smattering of antibiotics, vitamins, and painkillers, and even those are in short supply. Most medications must be obtained by waiting in a long line at the pharmacy in town (which closes at 3pm on Saturdays and is closed on Sundays and holidays) or by trekking to the main island.
- Lack of basic lab tests. The missing ones include:
 - Comprehensive metabolic panels (though basic panels are available)
 - Cholesterol check
 - Accucheck for blood sugar (though a glucose test is available)
 - Cardiac enzymes test to see if a heart attack has occurred
 - Strep throat test
 - Hemoglobin A-1C test to see how diabetes is being controlled over time
- Lack of a radiologist to examine x-rays. There is a digital x-ray machine but no contract with a radiology group to read the x-rays — even though this process could take place via email with any radiologist.
- Non-functional maternity ward. Near the end of 2009, the air conditioning stopped working, and it has not yet been repaired. Partly for this reason, the maternity ward — for which a team of ob-gyns, pediatricians, and anesthesiologists is always on call — is not working. (The other reason seems to be that many patients were getting infections when the room was operational.) Births are now being referred to the main island.
- Personnel shortage. Many Viequenses say too few nurses and doctors are on hand to see the many patients needing services, though exact ratios are unavailable.
- Lack of training and funding to use existing resources. Everyone says the health center needs more equipment, including the medical director, Dr. Mackenzie, but specifics on this point are unclear. What seems more certain is that personnel at the health center are not trained to operate some of the equipment and supplies already there. For instance, there is a sonogram machine, but no one who can work it; casting for fractures, but no one to put it on patients; and, as mentioned, an x-ray machine, but no radiology contract, and a maternity ward without air conditioning.
- Insufficient triage. Patients who visit the health center line up in the waiting room; those who just need a doctor to sign off on a quick refill of a prescription have to wait in line with patients requiring extended examinations.
- Underpaid doctors. Physicians are often paid worse than they would be elsewhere, and they sometimes have to wait up to five months to receive their paychecks. “Doctors won’t come to Vieques to get paid less than back home,” says Dr. Luis Rivera. “Would they be happy with \$37 an hour when there’s nothing to do here but drink and do drugs and fornicate? How many times are you going to go to

the beach in a year? We should be charming them. But we won't charm them with \$37 an hour, man." Relatedly, medical personnel that commute to Vieques are not reimbursed for transportation or housing.

- Tension between patients and health center personnel. Many claim the doctors and employees are callous and do not see patients in a timely manner, sometimes even napping while people are waiting. Nevertheless, some doctors at the center say patients in Vieques expect too much given the resources available. And one staff member (name withheld) says the atmosphere there is heavy, as many employees are unhappy with the large volume of patients and lack of resources to treat them.

- Underfunding from the municipality. According to an agreement made between the central government of Puerto Rico and Vieques, the municipality is responsible for the facilities and medicine at the health center. However, both are underfunded, and the center's medical director, Dr. Betzaida Mackenzie, suggests the town should do more. "The municipality has money for parties, but not for the emergency room — and if I need

“People need services, but one problem that we still have is we're working in small groups. My patients. His patients. Hospital patients. We don't work together.” – Dr. Jose “Frankie” Figueroa

medicine, they never buy me any,” she says. “It's not that I don't like parties; I like to dance, too. But there are more important things. It's a question of priorities.”

- The state may be allocating funds inefficiently. Some private doctors believe that having ob-gyns, pediatricians, and anesthesiologists on call 24/7 for maternity services is wasteful given the low number of births — and certainly now given that the maternity ward has been non-functional for nearly a year. Indeed, the anesthesiologists now seem to mainly be there to help in other areas. Many residents, however, are eager for the ward to be repaired so the maternity specialists can have a chance to work.

3) More cooperation within the island's medical community. The various factions of the medical community in Vieques — health center doctors, private doctors, administrators, nurses, social service providers, and health activists — frequently fail to communicate and coordinate. Private doctors generally lack privileges for using the health center and sometimes report hostility from health center personnel. “People need services, but one problem that we still have is we're working in small groups,” says Dr. Jose “Frankie” Figueroa. “My patients. His patients. Hospital patients. We don't work together.”

Indeed, Dr. Figueroa once encountered resistance for sending a patient to the health center to receive an urgently-needed IV. The doctor at the health center reportedly called Dr. Figueroa to complain that the patient should instead go to the main island, even though that process would take several hours. For an island struggling to cope with a health crisis, such a failure to cooperate is a significant obstacle.

4) More attention to prevention and education. Many suggest the local population does too little to stay healthy, regardless of the treatment options available. Dr. Joaquin “Tico” Carrillo, a neurologist who sees patients in Vieques every four-to-six weeks, asserts:

People [in Puerto Rico] don’t think in terms of preventative medicine, just curative medicine. We eat a lot of fat, and then we don’t want to get heart disease — and then we have to take medicine to lower the cholesterol....There’s a mentality among the people, with all the things politicians are talking about, that health is a right...But it’s my responsibility to stay healthy so I can work and pay my bills and feed my family. If the people think health is all the government’s responsibility, they’ll do nothing to keep themselves healthy. But the real responsibility is mine. People who drive at high speeds get killed on the highway, even if there’s an emergency room on every highway. The answer is prevention.

For this reason, residents often suggest that there be better education on healthy eating, healthy living, and avoiding contamination from the toxins left by the U.S. Navy during its 60-year presence in Vieques. “I think everything starts with education,” says Nuestra Escuela’s Ricardo Bouyett. “If you don’t educate your people, you won’t know what to do in different situations about health.”

Preventative psychologist Ileana Rivera points to Vieques’s high rates of drug use, alcohol abuse, and other problems as evidence that more must be done to “decrease risk factors and increase protective factors” rather than simply treating the symptoms after-the-fact. She and other island residents are particularly concerned about the situation that children face, as many lack responsible parent figures, and some 13 or 14 year-old girls are selling themselves as prostitutes in Esperanza.

Rivera suggests the core problem is that many residents lack exposure to the outside world. “It’s a closed system with boundaries tougher than the Berlin Wall,” she says. “But within the system, there are no boundaries: there’s incest, drug addiction, robberies. I say we’re not protecting our children and we’re allowing it to happen.” She suggests Vieques could benefit from an exchange program that “opens up the system” and increases exposure.

5) Better transportation options. The fact that Vieques is a small island, isolated from the rest of Puerto Rico, permeates virtually all facets of daily life, including health. An hour-and-fifteen-minute ferry ride (or expensive round-trip plane ticket) is necessary for residents to reach the town of Fajardo on the main island, and from there it’s farther still to more populous cities such as San Juan and Rio Piedras. As mentioned above, the trip to

obtain specialty medical care takes at least an entire day and is difficult for sick patients to endure — leading some Vieques residents to simply forego specialty services altogether, even for grave conditions such as cancer.

“I don’t see where anybody’s paying attention to the fact that people are in dire need of psychological help on this island.” – Myrna Pagán

Moreover, the last ferry of the day (assuming all ferries are running, which lately they have not been) leaves at 6pm. Nighttime emergencies that must be treated on the main island can sometimes receive publicly-funded helicopter rides, but sometimes not — and friends and family often must wait until the next day, if they can afford to make the trip at all.

6) Stronger mental health. Many Viequenses believe mental health is an overlooked problem. Cancer survivor and health activist Myrna Pagán asserts:

The social-psychological effect of the Vieques situation — with the Navy here by force, staying so many years — was the disruption of its spiritual life, the disruption of its tranquility...And I don’t see where anybody’s paying attention to the fact that people are in dire need of psychological help on this island. When the death of David Sanes occurred [in 1999, due to an errant Navy bomb], it was almost cathartic. It brought things to a head; there was an emotional explosion. People had a center again. We got together and struggled together and had a reason for being and a reason for having suffered as much as we’d suffered. Then we got rid of the Navy. And now, all I find is a social structure, a social scene, that has become untenable for the citizenry.

Psychologist Dr. Sylvia Rivera goes so far as to say the island is in a “collective depression.” Still, it lacks the resources required to combat mental health problems:

- There is no full-time psychiatrist.
- The psychiatrists who do come here often rotate, thereby compromising the continuity of care for each patient.
- The handful of rooms that psychologists and social workers have at their disposal are generally too small for things like group therapy.

In terms of addiction, there is no detox center in Vieques, even though levels of drug and alcohol abuse are high. In fact, a recent study done by the central government of Puerto Rico indicates that 89% of Vieques families have someone overusing alcohol. Moreover, about 80% of 12th graders are drinking alcohol, and 21% are smoking marijuana. But virtually all addiction services must be obtained on the main island of Puerto Rico.

7) More continuity and reliability. Viequeses frequently lament the toxicity of politics here, with each change in government creating a new set of patronage hires and sending the health system into upheaval. Funding allocations are said to vary widely from administration to administration,¹ with new governments rewarding allies and punishing opponents. Consequently, residents often say any sustainable approach to health must be independent of the central Puerto Rican government and the municipality of Vieques.

“Why is it so difficult to open a clinic in Vieques?” – physician, name withheld

Some suspect politics have also stymied outside groups seeking to help. For instance, one accomplished doctor who asked to remain anonymous tried to set up a health program in Vieques some years ago. The program would have brought in specialists frequently, at the virtually no cost to the municipality. After forming an alliance with local leaders and being on the verge of launching the program, the doctor found that the funding for his project was cut off. “We were just left in the

open, with no explanation,” he says. “My feeling is there are a lot of politics underground that are working by themselves...If I were to try to help again in Vieques, I know my funders would ask me if I’d have the same situation as last time and what preventative measures I’d take to be sure it’s different.” After several failed attempts to make something work, he now wonders, “Why is it so difficult to open a clinic in Vieques?”

Thus, the Vieques community — as well as external institutions willing to help — need better assurances that (a) health programs will endure as governments change, and (b) efforts to improve the health system here will be considered on their merits. Accordingly, the community may also need an apparatus for more vigorous advocacy on such issues.

¹ I have not yet investigated the veracity of this claim.

INTERNAL RESOURCES TO FOSTER IMPROVEMENT

Despite the challenges that Vieques faces, myriad resources are at the community's disposal to meet them.

Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (CPRDV) (Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques). This activist group was essential to the struggle to boot the Navy and continues to lead on community projects such as a new radio station. It is also in frequent contact with those undertaking the lawsuit against the Navy and potential champions in the U.S. Congress. Already, CPRDV has invested considerable time into AVN's health efforts in Vieques. In general, the organization is willing to continue to play a supporting role in this effort. Key individuals who might help include:

- Robert Rabin. 787-375-0525 (cell); robert.rabin@crpdv.org.
- Nilda Medina. 787-741-8787 (work); incubadora.bieke@crpdv.org.
- Felicita Garcia. 787-435-1675; biekeislanena@yahoo.com
- Armando Torres. 787-644-1139 (cell).
- Andres Nieves. cinevieques@yahoo.com.
- Myrna Pagán. 818-268-7323 (cell); Paganveda@aol.com.

La Alianza de Mujeres Viequesenses (Vieques Women's Alliance). This organization played a vital role in empowering women to speak out about the impact of the U.S. Navy presence. The group has also given assorted services to residents, including micro-business assistance, sex-ed, and a partnership with the American Cancer Society. It has not been very active in recent years but its top figures are again starting to lead on health improvement efforts. These figures include:

- Carmen Valencia. 787-444-9351 (cell); 787-741-0492 (home); gonzalezgerena.luisrafael@gmail.com.
- Zaida Torres. 787-435-6204 (cell); 787-741-1623 (home); zaida_312@yahoo.com.
- Judith Conde. 787-617-2081 (cell); judithconde@hotmail.com.
- Marianne Hernandez. 787-479-4827 (cell); Hmariannet.93@gmail.com.

Salud para Vieques (Health for Vieques). This organization is the vehicle by which the above mentioned Carmen Valencia has organized free clinics, including the ones that came with the assistance of the mayor of Carolina. See above for Carmen's contact information.

Medical community. Numerous medical professionals are based in Vieques, and several have expressed a willingness to participate in some way in collective efforts to improve health. They include the following individuals:

- Dr. Betzaida MacKenzie, medical director and general practitioner at the health center. 787-741-0392, bmackenzie@salud.gov.pr.
- Dr. Jose “Frankie” Figueroa, family practitioner. 741-2222, frankiefigueroa.md@gmail.com.
- Dr. Luis Rivera, family practitioner. 787-741-0738, medicinaprimaria@yahoo.com.
- Dr. Francisco De Cardenas, family practitioner. 787-741-8569, drfranciscoj@yahoo.com.
- Dr. Daphne Torres, dentist. 787-741-8765, dtorresdds@yahoo.com.
- Dr. Fanny Garratón, dentist. 787-741-1916, fmgarraton@hotmail.com.
- Dr. Sylvia Rivera, psychologist. 787-741-4767.

Emerging leaders. Like anywhere, the movement for greater justice in Vieques demands perpetual development and reinvention. Younger people who have shown interest in the health issue are:

- Kimberly Diaz. A mother and former nurse who plans to pursue an advanced degree in biomedicine, Kim has been an energetic contributor to the project on which I’m working and hopes to play an even bigger role in Vieques health in the years to come. She has personally had bad experiences with the health center, particularly with respect to the birth of her daughter. 434-984-5491 (cell), kimpossible@hotmail.com.
- Josue Cruz Morales. This young activist recently graduated from the University of Puerto Rico and hopes to attend law school starting in September 2011. In the meantime, he does have some time to help with discrete tasks. josuemorales18@aim.com.

Internal resources:

1. Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques
2. Women’s Alliance
3. Salud para Vieques
4. Medical community
5. Emerging leaders
6. Business community, especially hotels
7. Religious community
8. Independent figures
9. Municipality
10. Potential resource: Community Coalition for Vieques Health

- Carmiann Céspedes. She is a mother who is now entering law school at the University of Puerto Rico. She can attest personally to how her infant daughter was insufficiently treated at the health center. She also can do some discrete tasks on the health issue, though as a law student, she will not have much time to help. bluehared@gmail.com.
- Elda Guadalupe. This school teacher from an activist family is interested in the health issue and willing to play a role, though she lacks time to be a leader.

Vieques business community. Businesses could play an important role in improving the island's health situation, both by donating resources and by speaking publicly about the economic impact of health. Wanda Bermudez, president of the local business association, is a point person for economic advocacy in Vieques and, as a cancer survivor, knows the importance of establishing a healthier community.

More concretely, several hotels and inns have said that they would be willing to house (without charge) specialist physicians that visit Vieques to treat patients. This donation should not only help solve the problem of where to put incoming doctors, but also serve as a recruiting tool to secure good doctors.

The participating hotels include:

- The W Hotel. This massive luxury resort has agreed to donate two or three rooms every month or two. It may also be able to provide a conference room for trainings from specialists or other events. Contact Iris Acosta: 787-741-4100, Iris.Acosta@whotels.com.
- Crow's Nest Hotel. The hotel enthusiastically agreed to donate a couple of rooms a couple of times a year. Contact Eli Belendez (owner): 787-741-0033 or 787-741-0993; elibelendez@yahoo.com.
- Casa La Lanchita. A couple of rooms, a couple of times a year, but only June through November, assuming there are openings. Contact Doug (owner): 787-741-8449
- Seagate Hotel. A couple of rooms, a couple of times a year, depending on availability. Contact Penny Miller (owner): Concierge@SeaGateHotel.com.
- Inn on the Blue Horizon. One room, periodically, depending on availability. Contact: Mayrea Itsele Rivera (general manager), mayra@awci.us.
- Casa de Kathy. Local activist Kathy Gannett runs a small inn and will be able to provide periodic accommodations. She may be able to provide additional assistance, as well, as she has already been very helpful to AVN's efforts. Contact: 787-741-3352, kbg00765@gmail.com.

- I have also reached out to several establishments that have not yet replied:
 - Wild Palm Guest House (Paul and Lucy, hosts)
 - Villa Coral Guest House (Mireye and Annette, hosts)
 - Hacienda Tamarindo Inn (Burr Vail, owner)
 - The Bravo Beach Hotel (Saul and Katrina, owners)

Virtually all of the hotels that have agreed to participate stress the importance of scheduling well in advance. Still, if hotels are not available, there will be other housing options for specialists (see the next section on the religious community).

Vieques religious community. Several local congregations have offered to be part of any health program, specifically by (a) publicizing free clinics to their members, (b) hosting doctors that want to give prevention trainings to the congregations, and (c) providing housing. These churches are:

- Immaculate Conception Catholic Parish. This church has a guest house that they sometimes use for retreats; incoming doctors could stay there as needed. (There is talk of converting that house into a new church, but unless and until that happens, the space is available.) The church would also be happy to publicize the free clinics and host preventative education trainings.
 - Contact: Father Nelson Lopez, 741-2241 (work) or Deacon Justino Lopez, 787-741-0674 (home). As he has in the past, Father Nelson could also serve as a spokesman for the cause.
- Todos los Santos (All Saints) Episcopal Church. This church wants to help in whatever way it can and specifically offered to provide space for meetings, host medical trainings, and publicize free clinics. It has not verified whether it could house doctors, but I suspect that the priest (who has only been in place for a few months) could ask congregants to donate rooms as needed.
 - Contact: Father Arnulfo Arrambulo, 787-741-2668 (work). Though Columbian and new to Vieques, Father Arrambulo could serve as a good spokesman, particularly since he is a cancer survivor.
- Iglesias Metodistas in Isabel II and Esperanza. Both of these Methodist congregations are willing to have doctors speak to their members and publicize clinics. They can also house doctors in a guest house in Esperanza. (The Esperanza church once had an actual health clinic, but it closed about two decades ago.)
 - Contact: Rv. Dr. Maria Álvarez López (Isabel II church), 787-741-1473 (work), 787-394-3332 (cell), mariaalvarez1941@yahoo.com. Rv. Leocadio Torres (Esperanza church), 787-741-8520 (work). Both can speak to problems they have had at the Susana Centeno Health Center.

Independent figures. Several more people in Vieques could be helpful as individual contributors or representatives of their organizations:

- Ismael Guadalupe, a community leader who lacks time to play a major role but has indicated that he would sign onto projects when helpful. 787-741-2304 (home).
- Carlos “Prieto” Ventura, with whom I have not yet spoken but who is likely in a similar situation as Ismael. 741-1647 (home).
- Ana Sonia Ventura, the aforementioned former nurse who runs the community group Corefi. 787-741-2076 (home); 787-433-0413 (cell); corefisonia@hotmail.com.

Municipality. Several local government players may prove helpful in future health efforts.

- Estéban Carle, 787-741-5000, esteban.carle.gmv@gmail.com. This municipal secretary has been helpful to Carmen Valencia’s efforts securing free clinics.
- Mr. Abigail Gonzalez, 787-429-1912. He serves as a spokesman for the majority PNP political party and has been involved in efforts to improve the health center.
- Gilda Porfil, 787-741-8850 (Vieques Conservation and Historic Trust). She is a municipal assemblywoman with numerous contacts in the health world.

Potential resource: Community Coalition for Vieques Health. This not-yet-formed organization was proposed at a recent community meeting (that I helped organize) on healthcare in Vieques. The meeting took place on August 18, 2010, at the Fort Conde de Mirasól and was facilitated by Judith Conde and Felicita Garcia. As of this writing, the next meeting is scheduled for September 22, 2010. Time will tell whether the proposed organization materializes.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES TO FOSTER IMPROVEMENT

A variety of outside institutions are interested in helping Vieques forge a better healthcare system. They range from churches to nonprofit advocates to medical groups. But their ability to provide assistance depends on the willingness of the community to reach out and follow up.

Advocates

American Values Network (AVN). This organization does advocacy around progressive policy issues, with a special emphasis on mobilizing faith-based communities. It is leading the public relations campaign around Vieques residents' lawsuit against the U.S. Navy and legislation in Congress to create a world-class research and treatment facility in Vieques. It's also the organization that sent me here. In all, AVN has several things to offer:

- Time and attention — primarily through me, at least until I graduate from Harvard next May, though also through executive director Eric Sapp.
- Contacts that have expertise in many relevant areas, from medical services to missions work to community organizing to law to social entrepreneurship.
- Credibility in the faith community.
- Expertise in nonprofit work and organizing.

However, there are also several things that AVN cannot offer:

- Personnel on a long-term basis.
- Funding, at least of its own.
- Standing as insiders within Vieques and Puerto Rico.

Consequently, AVN's ability to help the island will depend in part on finding the areas in which its capacities match residents' needs.

→ Contacts: Jesse Lava, 847-347-0650 (cell); jesselava@gmail.com. Eric Sapp, 703-863-6403 (cell); esapp@eleisongroup.com.

Eaves Law Firm. AVN's connection to Vieques is largely through attorney John Arthur Eaves Jr. This Mississippi-based plaintiff's lawyer has been working for a decade on the aforementioned lawsuit against the U.S. Navy and leading the effort to pass the congressional bill (sponsored by Representative Steve Rothman, a New Jersey Democrat) calling for new research and treatment facilities in Vieques. He is already well-known in Vieques for the lawsuit, particularly for the work he did taking hair samples from residents to test for heavy metals.

→ Contact: John Arthur Eaves, johnjr@eaveslaw.com. Another key player in Eaves's law firm is Rickey Cole, who has been working closely with Rep. Rothman's office on the legislation: rickey@rickeycole.com.

Religious community

Methodist Church of Puerto Rico. This church was supportive during the struggle against the U.S. Navy and is eager to be supportive again. It is willing to:

- Identify Methodist doctors who can come to Vieques to provide free specialty clinics.
- Provide spokespeople for the cause and work with the U.S. Methodists to advocate for Vieques in Washington, D.C. (as long as it's part of a strong public relations campaign).
- Encourage the two Methodist congregations in Vieques to participate in a health program (assuming that those congregations are themselves willing).

The United Methodist Church in the U.S. passed a resolution in 2008 calling for health and environmental improvements in Vieques, so the church would not have to adopt a new position on this issue; the groundwork has already been laid. Still, the church wants to be sure that any health program in which it participates had widespread support among the different factions in Vieques. It also requires a detailed, written proposal at least three or four months in advance of any action.

→ Contacts: Bishop Rafael Moreno Rivas, 787-765-3103 (or 3105, 3120, or 3195), rafaelmoreno64@hotmail.com; and Rev. Germán Acevedo, 787-300-7503 (cell), gacevedo2002@yahoo.com or rev.germanacevedo@colegiometodista-sjm.org. Rev. Acevedo is especially familiar with Vieques and would serve as the main contact.

United Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ Global Missions program. The United Church of Christ donated time, money, and manpower during the struggle against the Navy. Indeed, it passed a resolution on the issue back in 1980, well before there was any significant public awareness of the issue. Felix Ortiz-Cotto, now its director of missions in Latin America, participated in one of the camps in the Naval area, and his wife was arrested.

Ortiz-Cotto says the Global Missions program is willing to help now with the island's health crisis, potentially by recruiting doctors for free clinics. One possibility is to use the religious group's "people to people" program. He requested a preliminary proposal, and Robert Rabin sent one on behalf of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques. We have not yet heard back.

→ Contact: Felix Ortiz-Cotto. 317-713-2563 (work); fortiz@dom.disciples.org.

External resources:

1. American Values Network
2. Eaves Law Firm
3. Methodist Church
4. United Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ
5. Ecumenical Coalition
6. UPR Medical School
7. UPR Public Health
8. Medshare
9. Americares
10. U.S. Rep. Steve Rothman
11. 330 program
12. Past clinic doctors
13. Additional prospects

Ecumenical Coalition of Puerto Rico. Comprised of Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, and others, this group was one of the key institutional religious actors in the struggle against the U.S. Navy. It has offered to take up the mantle again on the health issue, mainly by recruiting doctors from Puerto Rican congregations and potentially by providing spokespeople as needed.

→ Contact: Rev. Heriberto Martinez.
787-767-4165 (office),
hmartinezrivera@gmail.com.

University community

Dr. Walter Frontera, head of the University of Puerto Rico Medical School and faculty member at Harvard Medical School. Though unconvinced that health in Vieques is worse than elsewhere in Puerto Rico, he is willing to consider having the UPR Medical School partner with organizations on the island to provide better health services. First, however, he wants the medical community in Vieques to come together and delineate, say, five top priorities for improving health — concrete, tangible action items that would have high impact. For instance, one item might be obtaining radiologists to examine x-rays electronically from the main island; another might be establishing a monthly lecture series that teaches residents about healthy living. Dr. Frontera will then investigate the prospect of undertaking a pilot program in one or more of these areas. He seems especially interested in the possibilities of telemedicine.

→ Contact: Dr. Walter Frontera, assistant Carmen Aponte, (787) 765-2363 (work);
walter.frontera@rcm.upr.edu, carmen.aponte3@upr.edu.

University of Puerto Rico School of Public Health, Escuela de Planificación. This program provides reproductive health services including:

- Domestic violence prevention
- Substance abuse treatment
- Fertility services
- Adoption
- Counseling
- Pre-counseling
- Direct educational services
- Contraception
- Procedures such as vasectomies
- Referral services for mammography, testicular cancer screenings, colon cancer, diabetes, hypertension, etc.

The only related service the program does not provide is abortion. In all, the Escuela de Planificación treats nearly constant 30,000 users across Puerto Rico. Dr. Ramón Sanchez, who directs the program, has thought about working with Vieques in the past. He could give consultations to the community on possible improvements in sexual health and would consider proposals for something more.

→ Contact: Dr. Ramón Sanchez, Director, Escuela 787-378-1537, ramon.sanchez4@upr.edu.

University of Puerto Rico professors. Several academics have been helping Vieques on the research front, determining areas of need and providing intellectual ballast to the legal and public arguments of AVN and John Arthur Eaves. These figures include:

- Dr. Carmen Ortiz-Roque, 787-643-1186, gineco@coqui.net.
- Dr. Cruz Maria Nazario, 787-675-1486, cruz.nazario@upr.edu.
- Dr. Jorge Colon, 787-402-2015, jorge1962cr@gmail.com.
- Dr. Arturo Massol Deya, 787-579-5070, amassol@gmail.com.

Other nonprofit service providers

Medshare. This organization offers medical supplies and equipment to populations in need. For supplies (like defibrillators, stethoscopes, and wound dressings), recipients must arrange their own pick-up and delivery, but I have a contact willing to retrieve supplies from the organization's California location provided that shipping costs are covered. For equipment (like beds and EKG machines), Medshare sends only large containers (about 50 feet long), and the cost is approximately \$20,000 (the estimated value is around \$150,000).

→ Contact: For supplies, Kim Lawton, 404-537-5086. The application can be found here: <http://www.medshare.org/services/medical-mission-teams/form>. For equipment containers, Nel Diallo, 404-537-5088. Application here: <http://www.medshare.org/services/medical-product-shipments/form-english>.

Americares. This group provides free supplies and medicine to communities in the U.S. It has Spanish capacity and may be willing to give these provisions to physicians that visit Vieques to do free clinics. However, Vieques community members must specify whether the support would be for screening fairs, a community clinic, or the state-run health center, since Americares treats each type of situation differently. If we want medicine and supplies for the Susana Centeno Health Center, Americares would have to speak with Dr. Mackenzie and the person in charge of inventory to see whether support is feasible.

→ Contact: Ms. Morgan White. 800-486-4357, mwhite@americares.org.

Federal government

U.S. Representative Steve Rothman. This Democratic congressman from New Jersey has taken a keen interest in the Vieques issue. He is now planning to introduce a bill in September that would bring Vieques a world-class research and treatment facility, administered by the National Institute of Health.

Federally Qualified Health Center designation (known as “330”). The federal government provides funding for community health clinics to underserved, underinsured, and uninsured patients. Perhaps the biggest benefit is grant funding, which is up to \$650,000 for new applicants. It would also help inoculate the island’s health funding situation against changes in the central government. Several medical professionals (including Dr. Luis Rivera and Dr. Ramón Sanchez, among others) think this designation could help Vieques, and the town’s mayor, Evelyn Delorme is said to be looking into this possibility. The nearby island of Culebra already has 330 funding, as do several other towns in hard-to-reach places on the main island of Puerto Rico.

Past clinic doctors

Numerous doctors have come to Vieques to give free clinics. Some of those who came through one of the clinics organized by Carmen Valencia include:

- Dr. Nilda De Jesus: psychiatrist, neurologist for adults. 787-787-8788, 787-397-7639.
- Dr. Nestor Sanchez: dermatologist. 787-735-8001, 787-423-2565.
- Dr. Carlos Lao: neurologist for children. 787-384-4674, crlao@caribe.net.
- Dr. Jose Cardona: cardiologist. 787-758-8383 x7311.
- Dr. Dulce Maria Albandoz. 787-863-2120.

- Dr. Domingo Caceres Ortiz: family practitioner.
- Dr. Eugenio Roura. 787-645-4100.

Carmen Valencia may have additional contact information for these doctors.

Ones who came through clinics organized by Ricardo Bouyett at Nuestra Escuela include:

- Dr. Ramon Sanchez (mentioned previously): reproductive health. 787-378-1537, ramon.sanchez4@upr.edu.
- Dr. Kanty Mendez: psychologist. kmendez@prw.net.
- Dr. Norma Llaguno: medical director of the Department of Health. 787-721-7086 (work).
- Dr. Silvett Nazario: allergist. pulmonpr@aol.com. (Married to Dr. Cassal, below.)
- Dr. Jesus Cassal: pneumologist, director of veterans hospital. pulmonpr@aol.com. (Married to Dr. Nazario, above.)
- Dr. Ricardo Calcada: generalist.

Please contact Ricardo Bouyett for more contact information.

Additional prospects

Many organizations and individuals may be able to help, though the exact role is unclear.

- Nancy Adams. A recently retired toxicologist, Nancy has already donated substantial amounts of time to reviewing and critiquing documents associated with the health struggle here in Vieques. She is ready and willing to do more; she just needs guidance on how to best put her skills to work for the community. Contact: nhadams64@gmail.com.
- Maria Levis. Her consulting business involves helping Latino institutions obtain funding from the U.S. federal government. She also has numerous contacts in the health world and is responsible for the connection mentioned above to Dr. Walter Frontera. She might be helpful in pursuing 330 funding or other sources of support. 787-565-1227 (cell), maria.levis@gmail.com.
- AFSCME, Local 95. This union has expressed interest in helping, though we have not yet determined how. Contact: Manuel Melendez of Public Services United, 787-272-7222 (work), mmelendez@spupr.com.
- Boston Children's Hospital. Contact: Ursula Tice, 617-355-7198, usoraya@gmail.com.
- Catholic University of Ponce, dean of the medical school. This school received a federal grant to provide technical assistance to doctors making their health records electronic in accordance with the new U.S. health care law. We do not yet have a contact there, but pursuing assistance at this school could give concrete help to Vieques doctors and keep them from having to pay a fine down the road.

- Esperanza USA. A Philadelphia-based Christian organization that serves and advocates for Latinos, Esperanza USA, is willing to connect us to board members that may have physician contacts in the American Latino community. Contact: Jodi Reinhout, 215-324-0746, jreynhout@esperanza.us.
- Dr. Robert Doe. This bilingual U.S. doctor has done medical missions in Iraq, Haiti, Columbia, Nicaragua, and elsewhere. His model is based on training, education, and prevention. However, he is a family practitioner, not a specialist, and his faith-based model involves prayer, including the possibility of evangelism. He can visit Vieques in December or January if we want him to. Contact: 717-951-8478, rdoe@verizon.net.
- Dr. Ernesto Gonzalez. Recommended by former Vieques resident (and now Boston-based Latina activist) Giovanna Negretti, Dr. Gonzalez is a dermatologist at Massachusetts General Hospital who has been giving diagnoses online. Negretti says he is interested in doing clinical work in Vieques but lacks the funding to do so. I have not yet been able to reach him. Contact: 617-726-2914.
- American Cancer Society. This organization offers select services to Viequenses already, including nutritional supplements, some funding for specialized lab tests, and money for colonoscopy bags. They also provide a house in San Juan where patients undergoing chemotherapy can stay so they do not have to return to Vieques the same day. What's unclear is other ways they might be able to help. The contact here in Vieques would be through the Women's Alliance, potentially Judith Conde: 787-617-2081 (cell); judithconde@hotmail.com.
- Physicians for Social Responsibility and Physicians for Human Rights. These U.S.-based advocacy groups work on issues of health justice. We do not yet have a strong contact there.

PROPOSED PLAN

Ultimately, the purpose of AVN's efforts in Vieques is not simply to map needs and resources. It is to improve health. Consequently, we have aimed to figure out how best to mobilize the resources available to help fill existing needs.

Plan elements

Based on the above criteria — and, crucially, on direct input from community members — the following plan has emerged over the course of the last two months:

- Specialty clinics. A series of free clinics would take place every month or two. The incoming doctors would be specialists in the areas mentioned earlier: dermatology, ophthalmology, oncology, etc. They would work on a volunteer basis, but with funding for transportation, lodging, and food.
- Education. Incoming doctors would provide education to two sets of people:
 - Local doctors. Through trainings, specialists could provide a valuable service to the existing medical community in Vieques. All physicians need “continuing medical education” to keep their licenses, and incoming specialists could provide that. In the process, they would be providing an opportunity for local doctors to meet more often and establish better lines of communication and cooperation.
 - The general population. Community members stress the importance of prevention and healthy living, and specialists could give trainings in their respective areas of expertise to local congregations and organizations.
- Follow-up. To improve on past clinics, the community could take three steps to ensure that patients receive continuing care.
 - Have the same physicians commit to returning month after month.
 - Have the specialists do consultations regarding each patient with the local family practitioners. For instance, if Dr. Figueroa has 10 patients who attend a cardiology clinic, the cardiologist would discuss those 10 cases with him at the end of the day and give recommendations for ongoing care.
 - When possible, have specialists bring medication in case patients are unable to get the prescriptions filled at the pharmacy in town or the patients' insurance policies don't cover it.

Such an approach would require additional planning and work but should pay substantial dividends in terms of patient satisfaction and health.

- **Advocacy.** Although many of the doctors would (and should) be Puerto Rican, some should be from the mainland U.S. so they can see the health crisis in Vieques first-hand and then return to serve as spokespeople to Congress, the courts, and the American media. This piece of the plan will help improve the chances of the lawsuit that Vieques residents have filed against the U.S. Navy and the legislation being pushed by U.S. Rep. Steve Rothman. It would also help allay any concern that a free clinics plan might pre-empt a more structural, comprehensive solution.

Each piece of this plan is meant to work in conjunction with the others. The whole would, we think, be greater than the sum of the parts. Even so, executing parts of it, little by little, would be preferable to executing none of it.

In time, the community may want to adjust and add to this plan. Additional good ideas abound, including an exchange program whereby young Viequenses who want to learn some facet of the medical field can travel to the U.S., perhaps in partnership with a university, and a testing program in which American doctors who visit Vieques can test children for heavy metals.

Sources of support: which resources to use for the plan

Many institutions and individuals could help with health in Vieques, but some would be more relevant than others in executing this particular plan. The ones here are all culled from the lists in previous sections.

- **Leadership.** The internal resources identified above include several key individuals. Perhaps the most obvious is Carmen Valencia, whose scheduling and logistical work through Salud para Vieques is similar to the work needed under this plan. However, others should play leading roles, too — partly to spread out the workload, but also to help bring about widespread community support, publicize the clinics, and ensure that the program is not unsustainably reliant on a single individual. Established activists like Judith Conde and Zaida Torres, as well as emerging ones such as Kimberly Diaz, could assume key responsibilities. Ricardo Bouyett is also an energetic and capable activist who could make a large contribution (as are several others, too numerous to name here). The new organization proposed at the August 18 community meeting — tentatively titled the Community Coalition for Vieques Health — could be crucial. I also recommend including at least one of the island's three family practitioners in a substantive way.

→ Note: I can continue working on this project through the end of the next school year, which ends May 2011. AVN may be able to provide ongoing organizational support beyond that.

- **Logistical.** Several hotels, including the W, have offered to house incoming doctors for free, as have the local Catholic and Methodist churches. In addition, Salud para Vieques has traditionally used the Susana Centeno Health Center for facilities and secured transportation and food money from the municipal government; hopefully these arrangements can continue. The island's Catholic, Methodist, and Episcopal churches have also all agreed to host physicians that want to give preventative trainings to their congregations.
- **Medical.** The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico and the Ecumenical Coalition are willing to recruit doctors from Puerto Rican congregations. The Global Missions Program of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ may be able to do the same, as well as secure mainland U.S. physicians to be plugged into the process for advocacy purposes. The University of Puerto Rico Medical School and School of Public Health are also promising prospects for providing specific features of the program (see "external resources" above). Meanwhile, Medshare and Americares may be able to provide medicine and supplies for the trips.
- **Marketing.** The local churches just mentioned (Catholic, Methodist, and Episcopal) have pledged to promote the clinics to their members, which would help ensure good turnout. I suspect that additional churches would be willing, too, once asked (outreach remains to be done among the many Pentecostal churches here). The clinics could also be advertised through local doctors offices and at the Susana Centeno Health Center, as they have in the past. And, if leaders for this project come from diverse parts of the Vieques community — including, perhaps, businesses — the message could be spread to most of the island through them.

NEXT STEPS

Turning this plan into a reality will require more than words on paper. It will require action. Here are some proposed next steps for the community to undertake:

- Carry through with the proposed new organization, the Community Coalition for Vieques Health. This organization was suggested at the August 18 community meeting on health, and the next meeting is scheduled for September 22. Robert Rabin of CPRDV has sent out a press release outlining what happened at that meeting, including the consensus that emerged about forming the new group. A vehicle like this one will be important to developing fresh solutions.
- Identify key players to involve in the organization. These people should come from different corners of the community and include both established and emerging leaders.
- Create a project timeline. Having goals for each step of the process — when to complete proposals, when to start the program, when to book hotel rooms, etc. — will focus the mind and encourage timely action.
- Draft written proposals for the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico Medical School (via Dr. Walter Frontera). Both institutions could provide substantial support if engaged. Understandably, they want to see concrete, specific proposals; if the community jumps on these opportunities, the benefits for the people of Vieques could be considerable. For the Frontera proposal, in particular, it will be necessary to have the participation of Vieques doctors.

Much more needs to be done, of course, but these steps would be positive ones. Along the way, I and the others at AVN will be happy to help in whatever ways we can. But we recognize that the project's fate ultimately lies — as it should — with the community itself.

“We have to stop asking and start doing,” says Nuestra Escuela’s Ricardo Bouyett. He is frustrated that factionalism and individual agendas sometimes get in the way of collective action, but he urges cooperation and a pro-active spirit to improve health on the island. “We talk about alliances, but we have to do it. We’re not going to survive without that. We have to come out as one word only: Viequense.”

APPENDIX I: CURRENT HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

The health infrastructure on Vieques encompasses a health center, several private doctors, and a few organizations that provide niche care. The following institutions and individuals constitute most of the health service providers in Vieques, though the list is not definitive.

Health Center

The hub of health services in Vieques is the Susana Centeno Health Center. It is a diagnostic and treatment facility that provides basic services including:

- Emergency room
- Outpatient care (general medicine)
- Small amount of inpatient care (say, a bed with an IV for a few hours)
- Basic lab tests
- Basic medications (a few antibiotics, vitamins, and painkillers)

In addition, the health center provides the following kinds of specialty care:

- Pediatrics
- Dialysis
- Obstetrics and gynecology in theory, though births have been referred to the main island for almost a year given a non-functioning maternity ward

The health center's main contact is Dr. Betzaida MacKenzie, medical director and general practitioner. Her work number is 787-741-0392.

Other doctors now associated with the health center, all of whom apparently live outside of Vieques, can be reached at 787-741-1122 and include:

- Dr. Gloria Valiente, general practitioner
- Dr. Eugenio Gonzalez, general practitioner
- Dr. Denis Vilchez, emergency room physician
- Dr. Pedro Valé, pediatrician
- Dr. Carmen Alvarez, pediatrician
- Dr. Francisco Del Olmo, Ob-Gyn
- Dr. Rafael Vicens, Ob-Gyn
- Dr. Pedro Diaz, Ob-Gyn
- Dr. Rufus Ettienne, anesthesiologist
- Dr. Temistocles Disla, anesthesiologist
- Dr. Riualba Cotto, pediatrician

The center's nurses, who can be reached at 787-741-0394, include:

- Anna Carmona, nurse supervisor
- Ramon Rivera, registered nurse
- Hilda Rivera, registered nurse
- Lucy Rivas, registered nurse
- Leila Bermudez, registered nurse
- Hector "Beef" Melendez, registered nurse
- Elia Serrano
- Xiomara Carastillo
- Maria Matta
- Eileen Ruiz
- Rosa Navarro

Additional service providers at the health center include:

- Lorna Colon, Program for Mothers, Children, and Adolescents, 787-741-4572
- Emma Rivera, x-ray technician, 787-741-0394
- Luis, dialysis room operator

A few of the Susana Centeno facility's administrators are:

- Dora Berenguer, chief administrator, 787-741-1360
- Nilda Suarez, finances, 787-741-0398
- Gladys Costa, cashier
- "Pachy" Leguillou, demographic registry, 787-741-1827

Private Doctors

Vieques has three full-time family physicians in private practice:

- Dr. Luis Rivera, family practitioner, 787-741-0738, medicinaprimaria@yahoo.com
- Dr. Jose "Frankie" Figueroa, 787-741-2222, frankiefigueroa.md@gmail.com
- Dr. Francisco De Cardenas, 787-741-8569, drfranciscoj@yahoo.com

The island's handful of private specialists include:

- Dr. Fanny Garratón, dentist/orthodontist, 787-741-1916, fmgarraton@hotmail.com
- Dr. Daphne Torres, dentist, 787-741-8765, dtorresdds@yahoo.com
- Dr. Joaquin "Tico" Carrillo, neurologist (comes approximately once every 4-6 weeks, working out of Dr. Luis Rivera's office)
- Multiple psychiatrists (names not immediately available) that come occasionally

Administración de Servicios de Salud Mental y Contra la Adicción (ASSMCA)

- Dr. Sylvia Rivera, psychologist (United for Treatment of Children and Adolescents), 787-741-4767
- Iris Aponte, social worker (United for Treatment of Children and Adolescents), 787-741-4767
- Ileana Rivera, preventative child psychologist, 787-384-1230
- Sandra Martinez
- Mariannet Hernandez, volunteer, 787-479-4827 (cell)

Other institutional contacts

- Dr. Sara Lopez, Laboratorio Clinico Santa Lucia, 787-741-8790
- Rosa Lopez, Salud en el Hogar, 787-741-2061
- Carmen Rivera, Servicios Suplementarios de Salud (hospice care), 787-741-0309
- Nora Cruz, federal WIC program
- Dr. Eteldreda Acevedo, Farmacia San Antonio (pharmacy), 787-741-8397
- Manuel Corcino, Centro Envejecientes (Elderly Home)
- Ogla Silva, Centro Quiropractico (Chiropractic Center), 787-741-0414
- Adolfo Rosa, Emergencia Médica (ambulances)
- Julio Garcia, Servicios Medicos (health insurance liaison), 787-741-0575
- School nurses (no list)

Individual health activists (partial list)

- Judith Conde, La Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses (Vieques Women's Alliance), agricultural extension program
- Zaida Torres, former nurse, La Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses, annual cancer walk
- Carmen Valencia, La Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses, free clinics program
- Sonia Ventura, former nurse, Corefi (Concerned Residents for Improvement)
- Myrna Pagán, health activist
- Ricardo Bouyett, Nueva Escuela (has organized free clinics)
- Kimberly Diaz, former nurse
- José Luis Camacho, community activist

APPENDIX II: Preliminary Proposal to the United Church of Christ

5 de agosto de 2010

Felix Ortiz-Cotto

Area Executive, Latin America and the Caribbean

Global Missions program of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ

Estimado Sr. Ortiz-Cotto:

Saludos desde Vieques. Nos informa Jesse Lava, organizador del American Values Network, que el programa de Misiones Globales de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo interesa apoyar los esfuerzos relacionados con la salud de nuestro pueblo. Agradecemos su consistente solidaridad y trabajo a favor de la Paz de Vieques.

Como sabrán, Vieques vive una crisis de salud, con niveles inaceptables de cáncer, diabetes y otras enfermedades, comparado con el resto de Puerto Rico. Quisieramos explorar posibles maneras de trabajar con la UCC – y otros grupos religiosos – para aliviar el sufrimiento de nuestra gente.

Entre posibles proyectos en que Misiones Globales podría participar, sugerimos la coordinación de un calendario de misiones médicas a Vieques que traería a especialistas a la isla para ofrecer clínicas gratis. Esto podría ser mensual o cada dos meses, con especialistas diferentes para diagnosticar, tratar y proveer medicamentos a la población.

Durante los años intensos de lucha, 1999-2003, el Gobierno Municipal de Carolina organizó, con personas de nuestra comunidad, equipos médicos que viajaron regularmente a Vieques para celebrar este tipo de clínica.

Ahora, solicitamos su ayuda para reiniciar este proceso. Y, quisiéramos aprender de la experiencia pasada para mejorar el servicio, a través de los siguientes elementos:

- (1) Educación. Seminarios auspiciados por las Iglesias locales sobre la prevención y una vida saludable. Los especialistas podrían proveer orientación a los médicos aquí para así establecer enlaces y ampliar los conocimientos entre nuestra comunidad médica
- (2) Seguimiento. Una de las debilidades principales de misiones médicas anteriores fue la falta de seguimiento. Por ende, sería importante que los médicos visitantes consultara con los doctores locales sobre los pacientes y así promover un proceso de seguimiento médico aquí en Vieques
- (3) Cabildeo. Actualmente, hay varios esfuerzos encaminados en el Congreso y en los tribunales para obtener fondos para mejorar los servicios de salud en Vieques. Para aportar a estos trabajos, sugerimos la participación de médicos boricuas radicados en EU podrían servir, a su regreso de Vieques, como portavoces sobre la crisis en la salud que enfrenta nuestra comunidad.

Nos interesa mucho su opinión sobre este ‘plan’ o sobre otras posibles formas de colaboración entre el CPRDV y la UCC. Jesse Lava tiene una cita con el Obispo Lozada en Puerto Rico el 16 de agosto y sería chévere recibir una comunicación suya con anticipación de esa fecha.

Gracias anticipadas por su atención y cooperación.

En lucha, en solidaridad

Roberto Rabin
Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques

APPENDIX III: Email from Methodist Rev. Germán Acevedo

From: Germán Acevedo <gacevedo2002@yahoo.com>
To: Jesse Lava jesselava@gmail.com
CC: kimpossible101@hotmail.com,
Obispo Rafael Moreno-Rivas <rafaelmoreno64@hotmail.com>,
Lucy Iraida Rosario Medina <LRosario@ponce.inter.edu>

Estimado Jesse:

Yo tengo a Vieques muy cerca de mi corazón, así que soy yo quien agradece la visita tuya y la visita de Kimberly [Diaz], y el trabajo que ambos están haciendo en favor de la comunidad. Ya hablé con una de las doctoras que iba a hacer servicio medico voluntario en Vieques. Ella me dijo que si era parte de lo que estuvo haciendo el municipio de Carolina. Esta persona es de mi iglesia y está dispuesta a regresar a hacer clinicas en Vieques y cree poder conseguir otros medicos para realizar esto. Así que espero por ustedes.

Bendiciones,

Germán

Rev. Germán Acevedo Delgado
Asistente al Obispo Moreno