

Boston doctors, rescuers rush to help Nepal effort



The earthquake that set off avalanches near Mount Everest has killed more than 4,000.

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A Boston-based rescue service for international travelers said Monday that it was sending helicopters and medical teams to retrieve 50 climbers from Mount Everest and that another 50 remain unaccounted for after deadly avalanches there.

“Our immediate focus right now is to get those folks out in the field out of those environments and into populated areas,” said Daniel Richards, chief executive of Global Rescue. **“From there, we can have them shelter in place and get well supplied.”**

The earthquake that devastated Nepal and set off the avalanches Saturday has killed more than 4,300 people, including at least four Americans, according to the US State Department.

The American victims were Dan Fredinburg, a Google executive; Marisa Eve Girawong, a physician’s assistant from New Jersey; Tom Taplin, a documentary filmmaker from Santa Monica, Calif., and Vinh B. Truong, according to ABC News.

Richards said the 50 climbers his company is airlifting off the mountain were all unharmed. They include corporate clients and individuals who registered for Global Rescue’s services before traveling to dangerous places around the world.

“I’m very surprised that we have had no casualties and no serious injuries,” he said. “It’s really amazing — nothing that would even require a hospitalization.”

He said he hopes the 50 mountaineers who have not been located are missing only because they have been unable to contact the company because of the lack of phone service.

“Those folks could be out there,” he said.

Meanwhile, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center said it was sending nine doctors and four nurses to a small hospital in Kavre, about 20 miles outside the Nepalese capital, Katmandu. The medical team plans to leave Wednesday and return May 10.

“I’m expecting it to be very devastated and almost an austere environment,” said Meg Femino, the hospital’s director of emergency management, who will be among those traveling to Nepal.

The crew is bringing its own medical supplies, as well as tents, food, and water, so the team does not drain local resources, she said.

“Everybody is really anxious to get there so we can provide whatever help we can, as quickly as we can,” said Femino, who was among a crew of hospital staff who traveled to Haiti to provide medical care after a 2010 earthquake there killed more than 100,000 people.

At least four doctors associated with Partners HealthCare were already in Nepal when the earthquake struck and are helping with the recovery efforts.

Dr. Duncan Maru, an internist and pediatrician with Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and Dr. Dan Schwarz, a resident at the Brigham, were working at a hospital in the rural western end of the country, about 125 miles from the earthquake’s epicenter, where there were no injuries. They are among the founders of Possible, an organization that works with the Nepali government to improve health care.

Two fellows in the Massachusetts General Hospital Fellowship in Wilderness Medicine are working with injured survivors at the base of the Nepalese mountains.

One of them, Dr. Renee Salas, is at Pheriche Nepal, about a day’s walk below Everest, where she is helping avalanche survivors.

“She saw 71 people, critically, traumatically injured,” said Dr. N. Stuart Harris, the fellowship’s director.

As the death toll continues to rise in Nepal, those helping survivors are in desperate need of shelter, food, fuel, and other staples, said Brigitte Cazalis-Collins, director of Friends of Maiti Nepal, a Boston-based organization that combats sex trafficking in the country.

She said she has been collecting donations for disaster relief as she watches the news in despair.

“I know the country very well, I know the government, I know how it functions, and it doesn’t look good,” said Cazalis-Collins, who has lived with her husband, Joseph Collins, in Katmandu intermittently since 1986. “The places I knew are all destroyed. I’m heartbroken.”

David Breashears, a filmmaker and veteran mountaineer from Marblehead, was on an Everest camp about 19,600 feet above sea level, documenting the effects of climate change on glaciers when an avalanche struck, said his business manager, Ellen Golbranson.

Breashears called after the avalanche and, in a brief conversation, said he and his crew members were unhurt, she said.

He called “just to relay that he and his team are safe, and everyone was meeting at base camp and working together to share food and supplies and assist in relief efforts,” Golbranson said. The work included digging out tents and scouring for belongings blown down in the avalanche, he said.

Terry Holland of Pittsfield said he was enduring “constant, never-ending stress” until he heard from his daughter, Carrie Holland, 28, and her husband, Sam Russo, 31, Sunday.

The couple were on a 17-day trek on the Annapurna Circuit in the Nepalese mountains and felt the earthquake but were unhurt, Holland said.

“What a great relief,” he said. “It certainly puts a sharper point on appreciating the people and the safety and comfort around us every day that we overlook.”

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