

# Raul Ruiz, MD, MPP, MPH



In Haiti, Dr. Ruiz makes a daily visit to an injured boy in a tent amidst a camp of 50,000 displaced people. The boy was part of the Vulnerable Identification Program that identifies the very young or very old people who are not able to walk to the medical tents for care. Eisenhower Medical Center Emergency Medicine physician, Raul Ruiz, MD received the Humanitarian Healthcare Award from the Rancho Mirage Chamber of Commerce on April 28, 2010. The award recognized Dr. Ruiz's work in Haiti after the region's devastating 7.0 magnitude earthquake on January 12.

"I was in Washington, DC doing outreach work for the census, and a friend gave me a tour of the Capital. During the tour, I was introduced to Congressman Dennis Kucinich who took an interest in my work," says Dr. Ruiz. "We met the next day, and the Congressman asked what I was doing for my community. I told him about my dedication to improving public health care, my work in the jungles of Chiapas, Mexico, and my training in humanitarian disaster. He asked if I would be interested in going to Haiti. I said I felt horrible that I wasn't there already. He picked up the phone, called Sean Penn and started talking about me, and then handed the phone to me." Sean Penn immediately made Dr. Ruiz medical director of the Jenkins/Penn Haitian Relief Organization. Three days later, Dr. Ruiz was at the Miami airport ready for takeoff.

Dr. Ruiz spent three weeks in Haiti. "When we got there, we were camping in the yard of a house. We had 30,000 pounds of medical supplies and medications, so we did a quick survey of hospitals to try and determine the greatest need," says Dr. Ruiz. "On the fourth day of our work, we ran across the United States Army's 82nd Airborne Division stationed there. They gave us space on a clay tennis court where we could run operations. It was an incredible boost to our efforts. Our primary focus was to relieve the suffering of the Haitian people."

Dr. Ruiz's selfless work in Haiti and continuing reports from the region were instrumental in generating a generous gift of \$1 million dollars by The H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation for Haitian relief. Dr. Ruiz facilitated the donation to Samaritan's Purse®, a non-profit organization that has worked in Haiti for more than 30 years.

Dr. Ruiz also received the Influential Latino of the Year Award in 2009 at the Inland Empire Hispanic Image Awards in November 2009. The award recognized his humble beginnings growing up in Coachella, California with farm worker parents. "My mom worked in the fields and my dad was a mechanic and fixed machines in the fields," shares Dr. Ruiz. "Neither of them had a high school education. They continually stressed to me how important education was." As a teen he visited local businesses asking for money for college with the promise to come back to serve the community. He raised \$2,000 and kept his promise.

Dr. Ruiz completed his undergraduate studies at the University of California, Los Angeles and attained a medical degree from Harvard Medical School, as well as a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard. Ruiz specialized in emergency medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Affiliated Residency in Emergency Medicine before completing a fellowship in International Emergency Medicine with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative where he also obtained a Masters in Public Health at Harvard School of Public Health. He is believed to be the first Latino to receive three graduate degrees at Harvard.

Dr. Ruiz is currently working on the Coachella Valley Healthcare initiative, developing policy to improve public health care access to vulnerable populations in the Coachella Valley and internationally. In addition, he started a mentorship program for local graduating high school students who want to be physicians and appears weekly on Univision Palm Springs health show "Vive Mas" informing Spanish speaking communities about important health topics.