

## Cuba's Global Health Cooperation

### CUBAN GLOBAL HEALTH COOPERATION, 1959 TO 2015

- **May 1960: First disaster response medical team** dispatched abroad (emergency medical brigade and materials to Chile after earthquake)[1] Since then, 43 Cuban medical teams have been sent to 27 countries to respond to epidemics and natural disasters.[2]
- **May 23, 1963: Longterm medical cooperation** begins with 55 collaborators sent to newly independent Algeria at the request of its president, spending one year there.[1] Such “solidarity missions” continue to date, with the Cuban government paying the domestic salaries of health workers volunteering abroad, plus a small stipend to cover living expenses, exclusive of housing and in-country transportation (usually provided by the host country). Today, this arrangement, in which the Cuban government essentially provides the bulk of the financial resources, is limited to countries that the government considers cannot afford to compensate Cuba or the cooperants for their service—mainly nations in Africa, Central America and the Caribbean.[3]
- **November 22, 1975:** Cooperation begins in **international medical education:** the Aden School of Medicine founded in Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen, first center of its kind created with Cuban cooperation.[4] Between 1976 and 2005, Cuba founded additional medical schools in Guyana, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea and Timor-Leste.[1,5]
- **November 3, 1998:** Cooperation is concentrated in the **Comprehensive Health Program (PIS)**, involving provision of medical supplies and equipment,[5] as well as longterm stints by Cuban volunteers in selected countries, mainly in primary care and in remote and impoverished regions. The concept was that these Cuban physicians eventually would be replaced by doctors from those countries trained in Cuba at the Latin American Medical School (ELAM), the first attempt at a policy making cooperation a sustainable contribution to strengthening public health systems in other developing countries. PIS was launched after Hurricanes Mitch and Georges swept through Central America and the Caribbean, but was later expanded to countries in South America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific)[1,3,4,6]
- **November 15, 1999:** The **Latin American Medical School (ELAM)** officially opens, offering full scholarships to students from Central America and Haiti, the countries victims of the two 1998 hurricanes, many of their regions and communities already without health care. The first students arrived in March, 1999 from Nicaragua. Since then, nearly 25,000 have graduated from 84 countries, the overwhelming majority from low-income families, over half women, and from over 100 ethnic groups.[7,8]
- **April 16, 2004: Misión Barrio Adentro** launched with Venezuela, sending several thousand Cuban doctors to staff newly created primary health care units throughout the country, eventually bolstered with secondary and tertiary-care level facilities, as well as a training program for Venezuelan community physicians. [1,9] As of April, 2015, it was reported that these facilities included 569 Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers (CMDI) at the community level, over 7,000 community-based doctors' offices (CMP), 585 comprehensive rehabilitation centers (SRI), 1,000 dental services, 330 optometrist posts, 30 High-Technology Medical Centers (CAT) and 6 cardiology centers. By the close of 2014, 19 million patient consultations had been registered, over 2 million of these for patients in conditions of extreme poverty. In April 2015, there were over 30,000 Cuban health professionals cooperating in Venezuela as part of Barrio Adentro, and since the program's creation a total of 115,000 had served in Venezuela, some as part of a training program for 18,000 Venezuelan physicians in the Comprehensive Physician Training Program. [10]
- **July 8, 2004: Operación Milagro, a vision restoration program,** is launched with Venezuela to benefit Venezuelan, Cuban and later other patients in Latin America and the Caribbean, mainly those who could not afford surgery to correct cataracts, the number one cause of blindness in the Americas.[1,11] Initially, with financial support from the Venezuelan government, patients were treated by Cuban ophthalmologists in Cuba for a range of sight disorders, including cataracts, pterygium, diabetic retinopathy, retinopathy of prematurity, glaucoma, ptosis, strabismus, nyctalopia (night blindness) and retinitis pigmentosa; in 2005, ophthalmology screening and surgical centers were set up in participating countries, offering services closer to patients' homes, and training of local specialists was also stepped up. [11] Through June, 2014, it was reported that 3,470,206 persons from 34 countries [12] had been treated through this vision restoration program. Cuban institutions participating in the program number 165; another 49 ophthalmology centers have been created in 14 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Venezuela, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Guatemala, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Guyana, Paraguay, Grenada, Nicaragua and Uruguay).[13]
- **August 25, 2005:** The **Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent** was established, a specially-trained medical team, 1500 outfitted to respond initially to the disaster created by Hurricane Katrina in the USA.[1,3] While the offer was rejected by President George W. Bush, the team was soon dispatched to Guatemala, and later the same year to Pakistan, where 2,378 members served for 7 months.[3] The Contingent has served in a total of 15 countries.[2]
- **August, 2013:** The Brazilian government initiates **Mais Médicos Para Brasil (More Doctors for Brazil)**, and Cuban physicians provide the bulk of volunteers, contracted through the auspices of PAHO/WHO.[3] At the close of 2014, the program included a total of 14,462 physicians serving in poor communities, from the favelas to remote Amazon regions: 11,429 Cubans, 1846 Brazilians, and 1187 from other countries. Payments to the Cuban doctors are divided between the doctors themselves and the Cuban Public Health Ministry.[14,15] The Brazilian Health Ministry reported that the Cuban doctors are providing medical care for some 50 million people.[16] In early 2015, a Ministry spokesperson said that the program as a whole would be expanded, and expected to cover 4.209 of Brazil's 5570 municipalities.[15]
- **September, 2014:** At the request of the WHO and African governments, Cuba dispatches 256 doctors and nurses to West Africa to aid local health workers in fighting the Ebola epidemic:38 to Guinea, 53 to Liberia, and 165 to Sierra Leone.[17] These were members of the Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent.

## Facts & Figures

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### CUBAN LONGTERM COLLABORATION IN HEALTH BY REGION, 2014[18]

#### The Americas (25)

Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay

#### Sub-Saharan Africa (30)

Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe

#### Middle East and North Africa (2) Algeria, Qatar

#### Eastern Asia and the Pacific (9)

Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, China, Vanuatu, Japan, Kiribati, Laos, Nauro, Timor-Leste

#### Central and Eastern Europe (1) Portugal

**Total: 67 countries**

### COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH PROGRAM (PIS) COUNTRIES BY REGION, 2014[18]

#### Americas (10)

Belize, Bolivia, Dominica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines

#### Sub-Saharan Africa (18)

Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Lesotho, Niger, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe

#### Eastern Asia and the Pacific (4)

Laos, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru

**Total: 32 countries**

### HEALTH COOPERATION MODALITIES

#### 1. Special programs

- **Barrio Adentro** Offers a more advanced and holistic modality in terms of medical services offered within a country; begun in Venezuela.[1]
- **Operación Milagro** Provides screening plus therapeutic and surgical treatment to poor people suffering from blindness or correctible visual impairments; began in Venezuela and extended to 15 Caribbean and 12 Latin American countries. Nearly 40,000 have also benefitted in Africa.[1]
- **Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent** for rapid response in epidemics, natural disasters and other health emergencies. The latest teams were sent to Chile and Nepal in 2015.[19]
- **Psycho-pedagogical, Social and Clinical-Genetic Study of Disabled People** A disabilities study in 6 countries identified >1.2 million cases; a first study was carried out in Cuba in 2001. Later, similar nationwide studies were carried out in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines.[20]
- **Mais Médicos para Brasil through PAHO/WHO.** The first Cuban doctors arrived in Brazil on August 24, 2013, fulfilling a contract between the Brazilian and Cuban governments, through WHO.[21]

#### 2. Tripartite collaboration

Cuba provides medical personnel and other countries provide funding to help developing countries with precarious health situations.[1]

#### 3. Cuban Medical Services (Servicios Médicos Cubanos, SMC)

is the company established for patients treated in Cuba on a fee-for-service basis ("health tourism" offered through SERVIMED at a number of hospitals and clinics); as well as medical education opportunities for paying students in medicine and health sciences. SMC also negotiates bilateral accords with foreign governments requesting the services of Cuban medical personnel or medical educators, or health sciences student placements, costs covered by the receiving government (among these, Qatar, Angola, etc.).[20,22,23] The Economist Intelligence Unit estimates that in 2014, Cuba received approximately US\$8.2 billion from medical services provided abroad.[14]

**COLLABORATION IN HUMAN RESOURCES CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR HEALTH**

- From 1963 through 2008, 11,811 doctors from other countries were graduated in Cuba[1]
- In 2010, there were 28,346 students enrolled in family medicine training in Venezuela (3643 in premedical, 4262 in first year, 4566 in second, 5697 in third and 10,178 in fourth).[1]
- Through 2014, Cuba trained over 39,000 physicians from 121 countries, >24,400 of them graduates of the Latin American Medical School (ELAM). Specialty training for 2014–2015 includes 22,982 residents, of whom 19,627 are Cuban and 3355 from other nations.[20]
- 9513 foreign students were enrolled in Cuban medical schools in 2014-2015.[20]
- From 2005 through 2014, ELAM graduated students from 83 countries in 7 regions.[24]
  - 1) North America (3 countries): United States, Canada, Mexico
  - 2) Central America (7 countries): Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama
  - 3) Caribbean (14 countries): Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Santa Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis, Trinidad & Tobago
  - 4) South America (12 countries): Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela
  - 5) Africa (31 countries): Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Congo, Cameroon, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
  - 6) Pacific Islands (3 countries): Kiribati, Salomon Islands, Timor-Leste.
  - 7) Eurasia (13 countries): Bhutan, Saudi Arabia, Cambodia, Philippines, India, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Palestine, Yemen, Malaysia, Pakistan

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CUBA BY SPECIALTY AND ACADEMIC YEAR (2014–2015)[18]**

Specialty	Total	Academic year					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Medicine	9375	2004	1809	582	835	1137	3008
Dentistry	49	13	6	5	8	17	-
Nursing	42	6	-	1	6	29	-
Clinical chemistry	13	1	-	-	-	12	-
Hygiene and epidemiology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Imaging and radiophysics	8	4	-	-	-	4	-
Speech therapy	4	-	-	-	-	4	-
Nutrition	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
Optics and optometry	2	-	-	-	-	2	-
Rehabilitation	12	5	-	-	-	7	-
Health informatics	1	-	-	-	-	1	-
Technology in Health	6	-	-	-	2	4	-
Psychology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	9513	2033	1815	588	851	1218	3008

**OTHER STATISTICS**

- **Cuban global cooperation in health and other fields since 1960:** In September, 2014, it was reported that 836,142 Cuban civilians had served in 167 nations, the largest proportion in the field of health. In 2014, 64,362 civilians were working in 91 countries. Both figures include teachers and advisors in the UNESCO-prized literacy program *Yo Sí Puedo* (Yes I Can), adapted for use in 29 countries to teach 8.1 million persons to read and write.[5]
- **From the beginning of Cuban global health cooperation to April 2015,** >325,000 health workers have served in 158 countries, a large number of them two, three or more times, for a total of 595,400 missions.[20]
- **In April 2015,** >51,000 Cuban professionals were serving in 67 countries.[20]
- **This has brought health care** to 1,2 billion people.[20]

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