

“Haiti: Stories and Surgeries” - Part A

(This case was prepared by University of Georgia journalism student Katie Barlow for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on secondary sources cited below.)

On January 12, 2011 a massive earthquake struck the heart of Haiti’s capital in Port-Au-Prince devastating an entire nation and her people. Dozens of journalists flocked to the site of the destruction to report on one of the biggest stories of the year. CNN medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta was among those journalists sent to Haiti as a reporter. He reported on many stories of the Haitian people and their tragedies. However, upon his arrival there was a call for another kind of skill he had to offer- his practice as a physician. “The 40-year-old medical correspondent and practicing neurosurgeon... [was asked] to the fill the very void he was sent to Haiti to cover as a journalist.”

Discuss:

Should a journalist stray from their original purpose in the field? Does this represent a conflict of interest for Dr. Gupta? Should he help those in need of medical attention? If yes, could this cloud his judgment and abilities as a journalist? Does that matter? Should he personally make that decision or should he ask permission from his contractor, CNN?

“Haiti: Stories and Surgeries” - Part B

Dr. Sanjay Gupta willingly lent a medical hand to the tragedy. He said, “Many have asked: of course, if needed, I will help people with my neurosurgical skills,” Dr. Gupta said on Twitter, the social networking site, the day after the 7.0 earthquake struck the Caribbean nation. “Yes, I am a reporter, but a doctor first.” He helped many Haitian citizens, including a 12-year-old Haitian girl in need of brain surgery on the USS Carl Vinson off the coast of Port-au-Prince.

Discuss:

Did Dr. Gupta make the courageous decision? Was it courageous to take on the role of doctor and journalist? How should CNN respond to an employee who is dividing his focus from what he was sent and paid to do? Was it courageous to take the life of others in his hands when he was in an unfamiliar territory and could have ignited a great deal of anger had he not been successful?

“Haiti: Stories and Surgeries” - Part C

Dr. Gupta solicited the aid of his television crew in his medical treatments. Dr. Gupta said on Twitter, “[I] turned my crew into a crack med team tonight.” He allowed the cameras to roll as he examined a 15-day-old girl for a skull fracture. “With the help of a producer, he bandaged the child’s head with gauze -- a resource that, among many others, he has repeatedly said is in short supply.”

Discuss:

Is it appropriate to include other non-medical associates in medical interactions while on the job reporting? Is it courageous for crew members to engage in medical relief with no training? Is this a blurring of responsibilities? Could this be a problem? Should CNN have a different approach regarding non-medical team members as opposed to Dr. Gupta when evaluating their decisions on the ground?

“Haiti: Stories and Surgeries” - Epilogue

This was not the first time Dr. Gupta engaged in medical practice while reporting. In 2003, he performed brain surgery live from an Iraqi operating room. He will continue to lend his expertise when it is called for. “Although this professional duality has raised some questions over journalistic ethics, the networks have defended their approach given the unimaginable devastation.”

Was it courageous for CNN to stick by Dr. Gupta’s actions? Is it courageous to air an employed correspondent performing brain surgery?

Works Cited

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