

Irvine nurse heading to Philippines to aid victims of Typhoon Haiyan

By [JOSEPH PIMENTEL](#)

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An Irvine nurse is taking a homecoming trip soon but under far different circumstances than she imagined.

Kathleen Acab last visited the Philippines three decades ago. When she arrives in her parents' homeland in a few weeks/months as part of a nursing humanitarian aid mission, she'll see a country reeling from the worst typhoon on record that has hit the Southeast Asian country.

The wrecked homes, collapsed buildings and people sleeping on the street from Typhoon Haiyan's aftermath in the Philippines is hard enough to bear on television but Acab, a psychiatric registered nurse at UC Irvine

Medical Center in Orange, is preparing to see it up close and help placate the victims.

"Because it happened in the Philippines, it really hits home," said Acab, a 34-year-old Filipino American from Irvine. "It really touches me. Looking at pictures, there's so much devastation. It's just amazing how many people are affected by this. They lost their homes. They lost everything."

Acab, a married mother of six, chokes up when she thinks of the kids that are displaced and the parents who've lost their children when Haiyan's hammering rain flooded the streets and 147-mile-per-hour winds swept and tore through villages and cities across the central parts of the country.

At least 2,000 are feared dead and hundreds of thousands of people are displaced, according to the latest reports.

"It seriously brings tears to my eyes," Acab said.

Her husband and parents will take care of her children while she journeys to the Philippines. Her medical mission is expected to last a week or two.

She's planning to meet with human resources officials whether her volunteer time will count as vacation, sick or compensatory time off.

Acab is among some 30 nurses from Orange County and 1,500 worldwide who have signed up with the Registered Nurse Response Network, a program of the Silver Springs, Md.-based National Nurses United, to travel to the Philippines and provide medical care to those impacted by the typhoon, said Liz Jacobs, an RN and spokeswoman for National Nurses United.

The high level of destruction and ruins in the country has brought the medical and nursing community together, Jacobs said.

The National Nurses United emailed its members on Sunday night and within five hours, 370 registered nurses signed up to help, including Acab.

In less than a week, that list of volunteers has grown to 1,500, she said.

Created in 2004, the nurse union formed Registered Nurse Response Network after the Indian Ocean tsunami devastated several Southeast Asian countries.

Since then, National Nurses United has partnered with the Global Nurses United and has deployed volunteer nurses to aid victims of global calamity.

"When devastation hits like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the earthquake in Haiti, it was nurses who mobilized and volunteered their time to help the victims," Jacobs said.

Jacobs said the volunteer nurses work with local doctors, aid groups and help set up temporary clinics or are placed in hospitals and other shelters in the region to provide medical care.

A five-member team from the nurses group is flying out tonight (Thursday) to Manila and will work with local groups to plan how and where to allocate the volunteer nurses, said Jacobs.

"When the TV cameras leave and get off the front page the nurses remain and fulfill their roles as patient and social advocates," Jacobs said.

Jacobs said not all of the nurses who've signed up to volunteer will be deployed.

Acab was 3 years old when she visited the Philippines; she doesn't remember the trip.

Her parents are originally from Pangasinan and Zambales, parts of the Philippines that didn't suffer any major damages from the typhoon.

Acab said after she read the call to action email on Sunday night, she immediately signed up.

"I just said, 'This time you know what, I need to go,'" Acab said. "I felt compelled. This is the time I really want to help out and be there. I know typhoons happen every year but this is the worst of the worst."

As a psychiatric registered nurse, she'll be needed to provide mental health care that includes hearing the first hand story of those most affected.

She is already preparing for the worst.

"My family and I have talked about that," Acab said. "I'm not really sure how prepared I am to deal with that especially from people who may have lost their kids or loved ones. I don't know. Nothing can ever prepare you for something like this."

But she said, if she's called upon, she's willing to do whatever it takes to help and comfort the victims.

"I think what they need more than anything is someone to be there and comfort them and console them," Acab said. "The holidays are coming up. The Philippines has a large Christian and Catholic community. I just want to be there so they know that someone cares about them more so than anything."

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