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## **In South Florida, earthquake trauma lies in not knowing status of family**

*The lack of any reliable way to get information out of Haiti is causing anxiety for islanders' brethren in South Florida.*

BY ELINOR J. BRECHER

Ken Sejour doesn't usually spend Friday evenings boxing up takeout orders at his Little Haiti restaurant, Chef Creole, but with three of 10 employees out, he didn't have much choice.

The three are Haitian Americans who haven't been able to reach loved ones on the island since Tuesday's earthquake.

"They can't focus, so we told them to stay home until they find out everything is OK," Sejour said.

**The quake disabled cellphone networks and power grids across Haiti, making it all but impossible to reach anyone in the devastated capital of Port-au-Prince.**

**And it's the not knowing that has caused so much anxiety -- and in some cases hysteria -- in South Florida's large Haitian community.**

"No one I know is able to communicate with anyone there, and this is the most difficult part of the crisis," said Marleine Bastien, executive director of Haitian Women of Miami. "Most of the people coming here all day are bringing pictures of loved ones. They want us to find a way to place it on our website. . . . Some are frantic."

Friday afternoon, "a man came in crying unconsoleably . . . We see an array of emotions. Some just sit down, shaking their heads with signs of deep trauma. Our social workers have been busy."

Such information as she's gotten about two brothers came the way many are getting it: third- and fourth-hand.

"One brother is OK," she said. "Someone called someone who told us. Someone said they saw him."

**That's how a nurse at Miami Jewish Health Systems -- formerly the Jewish Home and Hospital at Douglas Gardens -- got some tragic news Thursday night.**

"A relative in Haiti outside the [earthquake] zone got information somehow, and [the nurse] got a call that her mother just died," said Blaise Mercadante, MJHS spokesman.

MJHS employs 600 Haitian Americans at its main residence/hospital, 5200 NE Second Ave., and outlying operations, giving it one of the largest Haiti-based workforces in South Florida, Mercadante said.

Less than one-third have definitive information about their loved ones, he said, and among the rest, "there is a lot of stress and worry. They're doing an admirable job in spite of it, but it's clear it's taking a toll. . . . No one knows if communication will be restored, so it's hard to get on with their lives."

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The Jackson Memorial Hospital complex also employs hundreds of Haitian Americans, and has been offering pastoral counseling services, "spiritual and emotional support," said spokeswoman Lorraine Nelson.

All-faith chapel services took place Friday morning and were scheduled from 9 p.m.-midnight.

**MJHS is also offering mental-health counseling to employees, and "senior management has been walking around the campus" listening and comforting, Mercadante said.**

**"Today we started a bereavement group through hospice for people who have lost relatives."**

**Yet for some still waiting, the workplace is a refuge.**

**"They look forward to coming to the job, because at home, there's nothing to focus on," he said.**