Coast Guardsman ensure Comfort crew fit for Continuing Promise mission

By Chief Mass Communications Specialist Teresa J. Frith

USNS Comfort PAO

Coast Guardsman health service technicians onboard USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) are pulling duty both onboard and ashore to make certain the crew is fit for duty and ready for action during Continuing Promise 2009 (CP09).

Health Service Technician 3rd Class Anthony Passalacqua is one of four Coast Guardsman assigned to the medical department onboard Comfort during its four month humanitarian and civic assistance mission to Latin America and the Caribbean region.

“I wanted to come on this mission to help people in need,” said Passalacqua, an Alameda, Calif. resident. “If the roles were reversed, I would hope that someone would help aid the United States in a time of need.”

CP09 combines U.S. military and interagency personnel, non-governmental organizations, civil service mariners, academia and partner nations to provide medical, dental, veterinary and engineering services afloat and ashore alongside host nation personnel.

“I’m an independent medical technician,” said Chief Health Services Technician Ray Francis, leading chief petty officer for the Coast Guard team. “That means I can treat some types of medical problems on my own, while others I do under a doctor’s direction.”

Francis added that the four of them are also Emergency Medical Technician qualified.

The Coast Guard was asked to come on the mission to provide medical support for the crew both ashore and afloat. Their job has been divided between working in Comfort’s sickbay taking care of the crew’s medical needs and going ashore with the Seabees to take care of any medical concerns while they are working at the various sites on shore.

“We came here with the expectation of providing our medical expertise, as well as learning how the other branches of the service and host nations do business,” said Francis. “We also get to interact with host nation personnel.”

While on medical sites ashore, they also help manage patient flow, assist with force protection issues, and work with the doctors and nurses as needed.

“I am really enjoying the interaction with everyone,” said Passalacqua. “I have learned more things now than I would have learned otherwise if I hadn’t volunteered for this mission.”