

January 12, 2012

Greetings from Haiti.

It has been two years since the major earthquake struck Haiti. It seems like yesterday. I am presently in Haiti along with other doctors, nurses and volunteers- most are veterans of quake relief - to help the Notre Dame Haiti program. Many of us became involved in Haiti through different routes. Many volunteers got involved in the quake relief that was centered at the field hospital, nursing school, and makeshift tents next to the Notre Dame house. These volunteers include: Notre Dame alumni, their friends, and those from around the country coordinated by Dr's Chris Buresh and Josh White. It was truly a most gratifying event to have countless volunteers give their time and sweat in the largest coordinated effort of selflessness. Over 26 teams provided very comprehensive care in primitive circumstances. All egos were left home. It was one of the most fulfilling yet most physically and mentally exhausting efforts I have ever been involved in.

What has happened since that time?

If you read the newspapers, watch news shows, listen to the radio- you may wonder if Haiti will ever recover. I have been back to Haiti fairly frequently since the quake. I have always been dismayed at the lack of any visible progress, until this trip. My prior visit was June 2011.

We had no plans to be here now, on the second anniversary of the quake. It was merely circumstance and dates that worked best for our group. However, I can honestly say I now see significant change (albeit by Haitian, not US, standards). In addition, I see a renewed vigor in the Haitian people to make things better. People often ask me "why bother-nothing changes". I believe it will and now is the time to help.

I became involved with the Notre Dame Haiti program prior to the quake due to efforts of Emil T. Hofman (who needs no introduction for ND grads) and his quest (at age 85+) to help father Tom Streit and Jean Marc Brissau's program to eradicate lymphatic filariasis. The program is based in Leogane and has a long, close relationship with Hospital San Croix (HSC) - at one time considered one of the jewels in the Haitian hospital system. The hospital closed to inpatients in 2007 and declined significantly. The Notre Dame Haiti program remained open and continued its support to HSC with outpatient clinics to care for those afflicted with secondary effects of lymphatic filariasis (hydroceles and elephantiasis). They also continued their salt program and MDA (mass drug administration) which treats the entire country for parasitic infections with the goal of eradicating filariasis.

This program is strongly supported by Notre Dame president Father John Jenkins and the Dean of the College of Science, Greg Crawford. Both visited Haiti and our

makeshift/temporary hospital shortly after the quake. This was a great morale boost for our volunteers and the Haitian people. Their support continues to this day.

So now what?

I've had opportunity to meet with Dr. Gladys Memnon (Medical Director of HSC) over the past few days and tour the hospital. What a difference from my last visit when hurricane Tomas caused massive flooding of the recently reopened hospital. Presently, the hospital has inpatient wards including three-7 bed adult units and one-7 bed children's unit. It is staffed 24/7 by doctors and nurses. Outpatient clinics are open and expanding. One operating room has new tile floors/walls and is suitable for basic procedures that require regional or spinal anesthesia. But the best news is renovation of the three-story building. The first floor will be the new hospital. Including inpatient units for both adults and children, 2 delivery rooms, 3 operating rooms, nursery, emergency room and outpatient clinics. Best of all, it's entirely air-conditioned. They anticipate opening within the next two months.

They have many needs -both equipment and medical personnel. They welcome visiting medical, surgical, dental, nursing, allied medical services (biomed, PT, etc.) to help with patient care as well as teaching. The goal is to empower the Haitian medical community. Nearly every area has needs. We would like to build on the Notre Dame Haiti program and expand it to include those willing to give their time and expertise. I feel it is safe to say (something hard to do in Haiti) we have all the essentials to make it happen and make it sustainable. Haiti will still call on you to be flexible enough to deal with many fluid situations! But it is better and getting better every day.

First-we have a stable, strong program well integrated into the Leogane community that is mostly Haitian ran with over 40 employees.

Second-we have a secure, reliable place to stay at the Notre Dame house (Residence Filariose).

Third- HSC is rebuilding and has a dynamic medical director, the afore mentioned, Dr. Gladys.

Fourth-we have a volunteer MICU nurse, Melody Webster, with a Masters degree who is willing to volunteer for 3 months on-site to kick off this effort, help coordinate, to re-engage those of you who've been here, and recruit new partners. She will do so working through InterVol in conjunction with Father Tom, Director John Marc and the Notre Dame Haiti program staff.

We are in the process of enhancing the present administrative structure. This has the potential to grow quite large and we will need a system to minimize problems we know we will encounter. We would like to start the Volunteer Medical Mission Program in April. Mission trips will be the one-week in length (Saturday to

Saturday). If you would like to stay longer this can be arranged. If you would like to visit before April we will try to accommodate you. Over the next few weeks we will send out more detailed information regarding this program.

I thank you for taking time to read this rather lengthy e-mail and hope you will join us in the continuing efforts to rebuild Leogane. Meanwhile, if you need any further information or like to be more involved -please do not hesitate to notify Melody or I. Warmest regards in the New Year.

Ralph Pennino '75

**Mission dates: 2012**

April 21-28

May 5-12

May 26-June 2

June 9-16

June 23-30

July 7-14

July 21-28

August 4-11

August 18-25

September 1-8

September 22-29

November 3-10

November 10-17

December 1-8

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