

Friends for Health in Haiti Newsletter

December, 2007

Clinic Update

On August 28th we opened our clinic in Gattineau, seeing patients twice a week in a little house on our clinic site. We see 15-25 patients daily for illnesses ranging from malaria to arthritis to hyperacidity. Already, a stable cadre of patients with hypertension and diabetes follow with us on a monthly basis as well. One such patient is Odette Blanc, who came for consultation the first week we opened.

Odette was complaining of weakness and shortness of breath and had noted increased urination and thirst. She had no history of medical problems, but looked ill. The glucometer reading of her blood sugar was high, meaning over 400 where the normal is up to 120. "Newly diagnosed diabetes with severe dehydration, if not more," I thought when I saw her, and said, "Mrs. Blanc, you need to go to the hospital." Odette refused, saying she didn't have money and wasn't sure they would take care of her well in the government hospital in Jérémie. "Please just give me some medication and I'll take my chances," she said. So, we reluctantly started her on diabetes medicine with strict instructions regarding her diet and fluid intake. At the end of the day, we weren't sure whether or not we'd see her again. But, she came back to see us a week later, looking much better with her glucose down to 250. Not perfect yet, but definitely improved!



Cherlie with a patient at the clinic

Each of our clinic days begins with conversation and prayer with patients waiting for consultation under our coconut branch-covered porch. We emphasize that the Lord sent us here and we ask Him to give us wisdom in diagnosing their illnesses and prescribing medication. It's quite a difference from the traditional healers with their leaf concoctions and the Voodoo priests with their dances and incantations. We don't need ceremonies for God to hear our prayers. He is always with us and listening to us.

Later, we teach the patients about their illness, possible causes, method of treatment and potential for prevention in the future. We answer their questions and together decide what medications they can buy. When money is lacking, we quietly make an agreement to have them pay on their next visit. While we don't want anyone to go untreated, we must replenish our supplies of medications so that we can treat others in the future. "The Lord sent you here just for me," one patient said after her consultation. What better reward is there for our labors than to hear comments like that?



Patients waiting outside clinic

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IMPASSABLE ROAD

I looked over at Cherie sitting next to me in our pick-up truck. “What do you think?” I asked. “I think it’s impossible” she said, looking at the road ahead, with huge boulders lining deep ditches dug out by the recent rains. At its best, the road up to our clinic site in Gatineau is bad. Only with careful driving can one avoid scraping the underside of the truck, falling into deep mud holes, or getting a tire caught between two sharp rocks. In rainy season, which is just finishing, it becomes nearly impassable in our current pick-up truck. We made it up and down the mountain that Tuesday, but not without damage to the truck, causing us to cancel our next clinic session. We depend on our vehicle for the mobility necessary to fulfill our healthcare ministry here in Haiti – as do the patients who wait for us to drive up that rough road to our “house clinic.”



Our current pick-up truck

As a result of our traveling difficulties, we have identified the need for a Toyota 4-wheel drive jeep – the only vehicle that can reliably handle this rough terrain. It would be terrible for people in need to walk for hours to our clinic, only to find that we cannot make it up the mountain to take care of them.

If you or someone you know would be able to assist with the purchase of a new vehicle, please contact (262) 227-9581 or friendsforhealth@gmail.com



Local mother and child

“ANPIL MEN, CHAJ PA LOU”

There’s a proverb in Creole that says, “With many hands the load isn’t heavy.” It’s similar to our English proverb that says, “Many hands make light work.” The idea is that joining forces with others lessens the burden of whatever task you have before you.

The task of Friends for Health in Haiti is a huge one – to take a plot of land in the middle of the mountains, in the poorest country in the hemisphere, and build a medical facility offering preventive services, primary care of acute and chronic illnesses and maternity services to a population of 60-75,000 people. It’s a daunting task, and one that has just begun – with patient consultations twice a week from a small tin-roofed house with no running water or electricity.

Quite simply, we need more hands to meet the demands of this task – partners who share our goal of improving health and changing lives in Haiti. We need a core group of partners who will pray for us on a regular basis, because without prayer, we have no power from above. We also need partners who will support us financially, both for short-term projects, such as the purchase of a jeep or assistance with construction of the

Continued on page 3

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clinic and of our living quarters, as well as those who will commit to long-term donations. Regular, long-term contributions allow us to pay salaries, buy supplies and medications, and conduct our ongoing operations.

I am so grateful to consider you as our partner – as one pair of the hands that will make our burden lighter. The road ahead may look impassible, but with your help and God's grace, moving upward is possible.

Sincerely,
Catherine Wolf, MD, MPH



Workgroup from Kingston Presbyterian Church

We will periodically list churches, organizations and foundations that are partnering with us. See page 4.

PUBLIC HEALTH CORNER

In each of our newsletters, we will include some information pertaining to the practice of public health, so that you, our readers and supporters, can learn with us about the health issues of most concern to those living in developing countries such as Haiti. We welcome feedback and further discussion of these issues with you, so feel free to contact us at friendsforhealth@gmail.com.

You will notice that we write quite often about the goal of providing primary health care to the people in the area surrounding our clinic site in Gattineau. You may wonder what, exactly, is primary health care? Basically, it refers to the first level of health care in the community and may include some or all of the following:

- First aid
- Immunizations
- Treatment of common (endemic) diseases
- Nutrition education
- Preventive activities
- Family planning
- Protection of water sources
- Sanitation
- Peri-natal care

Many of the services mentioned above can be provided by community health agents – trained lay persons who are stable members of the community and who carry out community education, first aid, newborn checks, weighing of babies, etc. They act as the first providers of health care in the community and can refer patients to the clinic for more definitive care when needed. Health agents also keep track of all pregnancies, births and deaths in the community and usually conduct periodic censuses of the community for statistical purposes. Of the sixteen communities we visited in our initial needs and resource assessment, only three received the services of a community health agent. Community leaders everywhere expressed a desire to have health agents in their community in the future; a desire we hope to help them fulfill.

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WE ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR GENEROUS PARTNERS...

Health Empowering Humanity, based in Houston, Texas – alliance being formed in order to work together to bring health to this area of Haiti and develop a model of community-based primary health care which can be reproduced elsewhere

Kingston Presbyterian Church, Kingston, NJ– home church of Katie Wolf. Recently sent a team of 6 down to help with carpentry needs in the house Cherie and Katie are constructing in Jeremie

Eastbrook Church, Milwaukee, WI – Milwaukee-based church for Cherie and Katie, providing prayer support through Lifegroup relationships and mission prayer time

The Meehan Family Foundation, Milwaukee, WI – pledged to finance a major portion of the clinic building at the Gatineau site

**FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS MAY BE MAILED TO:**

**Friends for Health in Haiti
P.O. Box 122
Pewaukee, WI 53072**

New – You can now donate online from the “Support” page of our website:

www.FriendsForHealthInHaiti.org

While you're there, check out additional ways that you can get involved.

See the latest photos from Haiti, download our new brochure, and coming soon – watch our video straight from the website!

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