

## Bringing Chiropractic to Haiti

MICHIGAN DC CARES FOR HUNDREDS DURING VOLUNTEER MISSION

Editorial Staff

Haiti is one of the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere; according to the *CIA World Factbook*, approximately 80 percent of Haiti's citizens live in poverty.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, irregularities in the nation's last legislative elections caused many international donors to suspend financial aid to the country, plunging it deeper into economic despair. As a result, living conditions in Haiti border on those seen in many Third World countries. Electricity, drinking water and other basic conveniences are considered luxuries for most Haitians; quality education is either unavailable or unaffordable; and the nation's health care infrastructure is virtually nonexistent.

That's what makes the World Children's Relief & Volunteer Organization (WRC) and doctor of chiropractic Rodney Nagel so important. In June, Dr. Nagel, a 1991 graduate of Palmer College of Chiropractic, spent five days away from his practice in Saginaw, Mich., and traveled to the tiny Haitian village of Lhomond, providing chiropractic care and treatment to hundreds of villagers, including more than 200 children. After returning from his trip, Dr. Nagel was kind enough to speak with *Dynamic Chiropractic* about his association with the WRC, and reflect on his experiences in Haiti.

*Dynamic Chiropractic* (DC): Good morning, Dr. Nagel. How did you first get involved with the WRC?

Rodney Nagel (RN): A couple of friends of mine who operate a Phoenix law firm, Douglas and Benjamin Lodmell, started the World Children's Relief charity last year. One of their first projects was to build a school in the village of Lhomond. While preparing to attend the school's inauguration, they invited me to go with them and provide free chiropractic care to the villagers. Part of their mission is not only to get education out to the impoverished areas of the world, but also medical help. While there, we also handed out dental kits, containing things like dental floss, toothbrushes and toothpaste.

DC: Had you been to Haiti before?

RN: No, this was my first trip.

DC: Were there any other chiropractors on the trip?

RN: Nope, just me.

DC: What were the conditions like in Haiti?

RN: It was unbelievable. From the second you step off the plane in Port-au-Prince, it's just mayhem. There are no streetlights or stoplights. Everyone drives with their foot on the pedal and one hand on the horn. People are in the streets. There's trash everywhere. They have diesel cars, and none of them are tuned right, so there's a lot of big, black smoke and dust and diesel fumes. They use wood for cooking, which is deforesting the island. There's major poverty - many people earn less than \$1 a day, and they live in cardboard shacks.

But despite the poverty and hardship, the people were all lovely. They still smiled at us, and they welcomed us very warmly. It was really an incredible experience. They were really kind and friendly to us, in spite of their conditions.

DC: What about the health care system?

RN: There's not much, in terms of any of the municipalities. A lot of garbage is dumped in the streets, with sewage flowing alongside it, and kids are playing in it and trying to cool off in the heat. There are animals, like pigs and chickens, just running wild. There's really not much organization in the way of schooling or education; health care; police ... it's just mayhem down there.

DC: How did WRC organize things for you? Were you set up in a clinic, or one of the local hospitals?

RN: There was an old hut that used to be the old school; we just put two school benches together and I started adjusting people, and the word spread. We had an interpreter with us, and he told the people that I was a doctor of chiropractic, and that anybody with neck pain, back pain, headaches, or any other types of systemic problems could come in and just line up. I started adjusting a few people, and within about 15 to 20 minutes, the place was packed. They all lined up, and I adjusted a few hundred people in that hut in a couple of hours.

DC: Was anyone in the crowd familiar with chiropractic?

RN: No. No one had heard about it.

DC: What was the most common type of condition you saw?

RN: There was a lot of malnutrition - not like famine, although there are some places in Haiti where the level of malnutrition does require immediate medical attention - but it's more like persistent malnutrition, where the people are just not getting enough calories per day. They're not getting enough minerals on an ongoing, regular basis. So, I wasn't treating conditions; I was just feeling for subluxations and adjusting them, and doing what I could to spark more life and energy into their bodies, and let the innate flow better.

DC: What was the typical reaction from someone after being treated?

RN: It was sort of like, "Aaahhhhhh" [breathes a sigh of relief]. Their eyes would get bright, and they'd smile, and they would move their necks around better. The women's necks were like iron. They were really tight - the women especially - because they carry these huge baskets with food and other items on their heads, and their necks are overdeveloped. There were a couple of people with walkers and canes that got up (after being adjusted) and didn't use their canes or walkers.

DC: Are there any plans on returning to Haiti next year?

RN: The charity would love to get more chiropractors to go. I will definitely be going back. It's something such that we'd like to get a chiropractor down there once a month or once every other month if we can. We'll set them up, and they'll just adjust away.

DC: How can chiropractors get more information on volunteering?

RN: They can call the charity at 602-288-2596, or the Lodmells at their law firm at 800-231-7112. The charity also has a Web site, [www.worldchildrensrelief.org](http://www.worldchildrensrelief.org), with more information.

DC: Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences in Haiti, or that DC might be interested in hearing?

RN: After my experience, I began thinking about how we practice in the United States. Here, we deal with not only the patients, but insurance companies; medical doctors; staff; fees; and the grind of what we do day-in and day-out. This was a wonderful experience, because it was just all about giving - just pure service to the people, and doing the right thing. It brings you back to why you got into this profession to begin with: no distractions, just pure service - just loving, caring and serving people. I came back to my practice with a whole sense of appreciation and love. Going to Haiti and doing what I did just took me back to the basics of why we're doing what we're doing, instead of putting up with all the distractions that we normally get.

DC: It puts things in a different perspective.

RN: Yes. Especially when you come back home, and you can flick a switch and turn on a light, or turn the tap and get good, fresh water. Just basic things like that ... it was an incredible experience.

DC: Thank you, Dr. Nagel.

### *Reference*

1. Haiti. *CIA World Factbook*. [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ha.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ha.html).

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