

A Humanitarian in Haiti: Bringing Hope and Healing to the Masses

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I recently returned from a humanitarian mission to Haiti, where I served as part of a medical missionary team from Hopevale Church in Saginaw, Mich., that also included two medical doctors, four nurses, a dentist, a physical therapist and a Christian evangelical team. We spent a week in the impoverished country.

It was the kind of humanitarian trip I had always wanted to make and the earthquake just made me want to go more. Dr. Rodney Nagel, the owner of three Preferred Chiropractic Clinics in Michigan, and who himself went to Haiti on a medical mission trip several years ago, was very encouraging, but warned me that conditions were probably worse than I could imagine. He was right.

Getting There: Quite a Journey

Even getting to Haiti was interesting. The medical missionary team flew into Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, from Miami and after a brief stop through customs, made a crazy four-hour bus ride to Dajabón, located on the Dominican-Haitian border dodging many motorcycles and avoiding head-on collisions at 60 mph along the way. We stayed at the Grand Hotel in Dajabón and ate at a local restaurant, dining on grilled chicken and goat stew.

The next morning, we boarded a school bus that would take us to Institution Univers in Ouanaminthe, Haiti, our home for the next week. But first, we had to cross the border between Dajabon and Ouanaminthe, which is quite confusing because it is only one of four chief land crossings between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The transition between the D.R. and Haiti is pretty harsh, and harsh is probably an understatement. Basically, with just a few steps you are crossing from a country with a moderately functioning government to a failed one. Most of the streets and roads were dirt and in horrific shape, which made travel difficult and slow because of deep ruts and mud holes. Plus, there were no traffic controls and motor scooters shooting in and out, making for "exciting" travel, to say the least.

Eye-Opening Conditions



Before the earthquake hit [Port-Au-Prince](#), Ouanaminthe had a population of about 100,000 people; it is estimated that almost double that number are in Ouanaminthe now. Ouanaminthe is more developed than many other Haitian cities due to the busy border it shares with Dajabon, but is still very rural, underdeveloped, lacking in agriculture and has little manufacturing except for a small Levi's clothing factory. Few people in the town are employed "full-time", and most work "spot-jobs. Many live in very small two- or three-room homes made of concrete block or recycled wood.

One of the most pressing needs in Ouanaminthe is clean, safe drinking water. Most water drawn from either shallow wells on personal property or the community water sources has tested positive for harmful bacteria including *E. coli*. While in Ouanaminthe, the team and I shared sleeping quarters with a team of water experts from Colorado and student volunteers from Kent State University, who had brought simple water-filtration systems to the people of Ouanaminthe.

The other pressing need for the people in Ouanaminthe is quality health care, especially with the influx of refugees coming in from Port-Au-Prince. Thus the reason for the medical mission trip from Hopevale. Although the facilities were better than most places in the area following the earthquake in Port-Au-Prince, they were far below the standards seen in most hospitals in the United States. Complicating matters, temperatures were consistently in the high 90's with 90-100 percent humidity, along with a daily hour-long thunderstorm that only increased the humidity.

Giving the Gift of Chiropractic

The only place in the clinic that had air conditioning was the operating room; I estimate that I lost 10 pounds during the trip because of the heat and the physical labor. I set up my makeshift chiropractic office in an unused birthing room and, after adjusting the medical team to prepare them for the day, immediately had a steady stream of patients with complaints of back and neck pain, headaches, frozen shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee and ankle pain that didn't seem to stop until we packed up to go home.

I'm proud to say that I witnessed some incredible medical and chiropractic miracles while I was there. I was truly amazed and humbled. One case in particular left quite an impression. There was a tearful young school girl around the age of 9 or 10 who could not stand up straight due to back pain. She had a slight distended abdomen and couldn't recall her last bowel movement. Without diagnostic tools (not even X-rays), the medical doctors couldn't tell if there was a bowel obstruction or any other internal problem. There was talk about exploratory surgery.

I asked the MDs if I could adjust her first to see if it would help. I palpated her lower thoracic and lumbar areas, found several vertebral subluxations and proceeded to adjust those areas. The young girl then got off the table, stood up straight, told the interpreter she felt better and then asked where the bathroom was! The MDs were both surprised and elated.

Another thing I will always remember is the happiness of all the children, especially a young boy named Johnny (who was interviewed on television by Anderson Cooper of CNN, by the way). Johnny lost both his parents and fractured his leg during the earthquake, yet he always had a smile on his face!

My trip to Haiti taught me a great many things. Certainly I have greater appreciation for the medical and chiropractic facilities in the United States, plus the luxury of running (and hot) water and plumbing, air conditioning, basic transportation, and four walls and a roof over my head. But having an opportunity to help so many people in need - that was what mattered most. Despite all the challenges, I would return in a heartbeat.

For another account of chiropractic relief efforts that took place in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake, read "Helping Hands in Haiti: Chiropractic Relief One Adjustment at a Time" by [Dr. Rennie Statler](#) (April 9 DC).

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