Reflections on Work in Haiti

“I was always greeted with a smile and provided with a chair by my patients, even if it was the only chair they had. I was touched by their generosity and their appreciation for the work I was doing.”
Shannon Cawley
University of Notre Dame
MS Global Health 2013

“The most enjoyable and rewarding part of what I was able to experience in my last week in Haiti was knowing that we were making an immediate impact on the individuals we operated on. By operating on these men there is an immediate and tangible result.”
Michael Dineen
University of Notre Dame
Bachelor of Science 2012
MS Global Health 2013

Bon Sel Dayiti Upgrades

The Bon Sel Dayiti salt factory, located in Port-au-Prince, is getting an upgrade. The Haiti Program operates the facility with the assistance of the Ministry of Health. The factory was damaged in the 2010 earthquake, and was closed during the cholera epidemic for much of 2011. Despite repairs to the physical plant, after several years of use, the salt processing equipment was showing signs of wear and tear.

In November 2012, the Haiti Program formally partnered with Cargill Salt. Jim Reimer, the Salt Program Director and former Cargill executive, has been leading the charge to upgrade the facility. Recently, the Program purchased a salt sifter, grater, filler, and sealer. This equipment, Jim explains, will “Allow us to streamline production and give us the ability to produce higher quantities of better salt to help more people.”

As the Program prepares to increase the volume of sales due to a new national distribution agreement, factory staff have been adjusting to their new roles. The grater and sifter will enable the process to refine the quality of the salt and prepare and market both large and small grain salt to various buyers on the private market and commercial clients. The filler and sealer will speed the packaging process, while new packaging materials and techniques will make the bags of salt more durable for the rough and tumble world of Haitian outdoor markets.

The equipment arrived throughout the spring and early summer, and will be fully operational in August. As sales and distribution increase throughout the fall, more equipment will be arriving to enable the program to increase the availability of Bon Sel Dayiti and continue the fight against LF and Iodine Deficiency Disorder.
Eck Institute Research Continues in Haiti

Shannon Cawley and Mike Dineen, Masters Candidates in the Eck Institute for Global Health, recently returned from Leogane where they conducted field research for their theses. During her first trip to Haiti, Shannon spent six weeks living and working in Leogane as she examined community awareness of *H. pylori*, a common digestive infection in the developing world. Mike was a veteran Leogane visitor, having accompanied his father, Dr. Marty Dineen ('74) on medical mission trips while in college. Mike examined the possible uses of a device designed by F-Cubed for field testing in Haiti. Mike also scrubbed in to observe his father doing hydrocele surgeries. Mike’s work in South Bend (where F-Cubed is based) and in Leogane will help the program to enhance LF diagnostic speed and accuracy. This will improve treatment opportunities for patients. For Mike, working with the patients was particularly rewarding: “The surgeries almost immediately relieve the mental scourge and physical pain associated with this disease.”

As a part of her research, Shannon worked with the Haiti Program’s Dr. Marie Denise Milord to study *H. pylori*. Shannon also conducted surveys of medical workers and then developed and distributed an educational brochure about the disease and possible treatment options. This work will greatly strengthen the public health system in Leogane. Reflecting on her trip, Shannon says: “My experience in Haiti was full of life. I felt a great sense of community both at the residence and working with patients in the field.”

The Haiti Program Goes to Washington

On July 24th-25th, members of the Haitian Ministry of Health & Population met with representatives from the Notre Dame Haiti Program and our partners in the fight against LF. The semi-annual Partners Meeting, held in Washington DC, gives those involved a chance to share updates, as well as to coordinate a plan for the work to come. After a day and a half of meeting, the session was opened up to the public with a special panel discussion on the LF elimination efforts. Representatives from USAID, CDC, PAHO, Sabin Vaccine Institute, and various other Neglected Disease-focused non-profits all gathered to learn more about the recent Mass Drug Administration campaign. Dr. Luccene Desir, NDHP Medical Director and a member of the panel, reported that “There was a great exchange of ideas and information, and it was wonderful to be able to discuss our work with the Ministry and our funders.” The next meetings will be this winter as we prepare for the Port-au-Prince MDA, just one step closer to eliminating LF from Haiti.
Meeting Adam

There are times when you are reminded how good you have it. Temperatures drop and winds howl, but you are snug in front of a fireplace. There’s a news report about people going hungry, but you are packing leftovers for tomorrow’s lunch.

Then you meet Adam, 42, of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Adam seemed to have not a care in the world as he ate a lunch of pasta and vegetables at the Residence Filariose in Leogane, a small port town west of the country’s capital.

Overseen by the University of Notre Dame Haiti Program, the Residence serves as a training facility and guesthouse for visiting researchers focused on lymphatic filariasis (LF). LF is a debilitating mosquito-borne disease, and the UND Haiti Program has a goal of eliminating it in the country by 2020. I was at the Residence to do a story for Cargill News on the company’s support of the Haiti program.

This day, I was eating lunch with Adam, Father Tom Streit, who founded the program 20 years ago, and Jean Marc Brissau, the program’s director.

Adam smiled and joked, but his carefree demeanor didn’t tell his whole story. For many years, he suffered from elephantiasis in his right leg. Elephantiasis is a name created to describe the dramatic and disabling physical manifestation of LF in which a leg swells like an elephant’s.

When a severe earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, a wall fell on Adam, striking his right leg. The leg had to be amputated at the knee. The swollen, disfigured leg below the knee was gone.

Adam related these details as if they were nothing major. But when asked about his family, he added that when the wall collapsed on him, it also killed his wife and two of his three children.

He smiles as he remembers that his wife, Rose Marie, was fun to be around. They met in Port-au-Prince. He is tall; she, not so much. He misses her and the two sons, Michelet, 19, and Myrmose, 14.

After the earthquake, he and daughter Bethanie, 13, lived with his sister for a while. Recently, they have found a one-room place. He doesn’t have a job in a country labeled the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. But he was thankful to Father Tom, who got him a mattress so they weren’t sleeping on the ground.

One would think Adam would be gloomy and dejected as he sat there eating lunch. Likely, there are times like that. But for now, Adam was having a congenial lunch with Brissau, Father Tom and a stranger. And, as Adam pointed out, he doesn’t have to worry about his leg hurting like it did with the disease. Of course, he has only one full leg now.

Observing all of this, you wonder how much you have taken your life for granted. Suddenly, irritations and regrets seem quite small—trivial compared to life’s benefits. Adam, a man from whom much has been taken, has kindly given me a gift.

-Mark Klein
Thank You Erin!

In the fall of 2011, eighth grader Erin’s family visited Notre Dame without her—a crushing blow. Erin’s dad, Tom, returned to New Jersey with a brochure about the Haiti Program for his daughter who has an interest in service. After reviewing the brochure and doing more research, Erin leapt into action. With the help of her father, and in concert with Program Staff, Erin organized the Change for Haiti fundraising campaign.

Launched as a Lenten service project to raise funds and awareness in 2012, Erin encouraged many schools to participate by suggesting multiple ideas for Change for Haiti fundraising. Now a rising sophomore, Erin spent the past two summers fine-tuning program materials, and designing a toolkit for other students to conduct their own Change for Haiti fundraisers. The program is designed to help students learn how to organize events and how to work with their teachers to broaden student knowledge about Haiti. This past fall, Erin introduced Change for Haiti to many more schools in her New Jersey diocese, and while schools focused on Hurricane Sandy relief this year, many principals are already planning for next year’s activities. This spring, Erin’s former grade school, the Academy of Our Lady, hosted a Rosary Walk to raise money for Change for Haiti.

To learn more about Change for Haiti, or to start a campaign in your area, please check out http://haiti.nd.edu/get-involved/host-a-fundraiser/ and Thank You Erin for your wonderful work!