

## **Fires of Discontent**

As I start to write this narrative of our May trip, the images from CNN being reported in July of burning cars and tires and trapped tourists in their hotels are foremost in my mind. From what I have read, there was a move by the prime minister to raise fuel prices by almost 50% as part of a financial requirement between the Haitian government and the IMF to raise revenues and encourage reciprocal international lending. But imagine how you would react here in the US if you woke up and found that a hike of 38% in gas, 47% in diesel and 51% in kerosene prices had occurred overnight – no public discussion, no apparent investigation of alternate remedies and no apparent sense of the hardship that would be endured by the communities who would take the brunt of these new taxes. And also imagine, if you were one of the hard working people of Haiti, how would you fit a \$5 per gallon price into your budget when you earn an income of \$1 to \$2 per day? The numbers just can't work. So the Haitian people, already dealing with dire day-to-day living conditions, reacted with the only voice left – violent public disorder. We saw that up close and personal in May on a different issue, but more on that later.

## **A Journey Like No Other**

The trip started innocently enough with our usual mixed group of Haitian and American medical personnel settled in for the grueling 24-hour road trip to Dame-Marie.



L-R: Left - Wilkens Gilbert MD, Bus Driver, Jim Schepker and Pierre Antoine; Right – Donna Jones RN, Valerie Rossetti MD, Shawnee Vera RN, Sara Bowlann RN, Soana Laguerre MD, Amanda O'Connell RN, Soralid Heredia RN, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD, Joseph Glavylove MD, Benoucheca Pierre MD, Djovensky Mathurin MD; Missing from photos - Kathy Aries RN, Michael R. Bourque MD and Anne D'Orvilliers

When we reached the mountainous terrain, we were greeted by the now familiar appearance of old and new skeletons of prior travel mishaps and mechanical difficulties. Although I know little of engines, I would guess that without the part by the driver's side door installed, the vehicle on the right would not be going anywhere soon. Amazingly, the load is still covered and intact while ivy is growing on and around the truck.



Further along the route, a landslide from a recent storm blocked the road. The slide was already hours old as reflected by the line of vehicles and people seeking shelter from the direct sun with whatever cover they had. Fortunately, a road crew was already working and the path was cleared.



Several mountains later we came upon two more obstacles – one was still passable but the second stopped us in our tracks. The people of these villages were mounting a public protest on the overall condition of this one road that connects all of Haiti and the only overland route that goes to Dame-Marie. The protest took the form of pickaxes and shovels used by an angry group making quick work of literally chopping the road apart so it was impassable. With the sage advice of our constant companion, hospital administrator and our Haitian guardian, Monsieur Pierre Antoine, we left the bus and our supplies, walked across the growing divide and up to a neighboring church / convent center / school where we took shelter.



There was no question that our team was somewhat rattled by this noisy sudden protest by the local townspeople. But when we settled down in the church courtyard, we had a sharing time where we expressed our gratitude for our safety and for the blessings we all enjoy. Minutes later, a pack of cards came out and newcomers and veteran missionaries alike were once again at inner peace and focused on the mission ahead while we waited for a bus coming from Dame-Marie to take us the rest of the way. *What an amazing group of special hearts.*





And the ending to this pause in our travels...the local elected Senator of the area ultimately arrived. After a lively discussion among the parties, a construction bucket loader came and repaired the road. Promises were made to repair the worst of the road conditions in the next three months and peace was restored. This is how the regular people of Haiti must make their voices heard.

Riding a bus is a primary travel mode for most people and their belongings in Haiti – here are sights you won't often see in the US.



Dried fish for a family dinner



A prized possession of a goat relocating to a new home!

### **New Changes in our Hospital**

Upon entry into the Hôpital de la Communauté Dame-Marienne (Community Hospital of Dame-Marie - HCDM), there was more than the expectant hum of hundreds of patients. There was an atmosphere by the local hospital staff of new energy and hope. We were extremely surprised and pleased that Monsieur Pierre Antoine had found funds to implement some of the changes we have suggested. We saw a redesign of the pre-op and post-op rooms for patient privacy, as well as air conditioning units installed – a transformation like one from our very own makeover shows on TV.



Pre-Op – Before (left) and after (right)



Post-Op – Before (left) and after (right)

And construction on the third unfinished hospital floor of a safeguarded shed for storage of medical supplies and a new solar system for powering the business office and computers.



So everyone on the team was invigorated emotionally to see that our community of Dame-Marie continues to take ownership and initiative, and all efforts, Haitian and American, united toward the goal of making this place a center of excellence for the region.

### **The Nursery**

Although the hospital activity ramps up dramatically from its sleepy self when we arrive, there was a five-year old girl suffering from malnutrition in the nursery. Up close she is the size of a two-year old. No IV's, just food delivered in a style more reminiscent of home than hospital, but it works. The food is the medicine and key to her survival, but I wonder what she will have when she returns home.



### **New Nursing Support**

We were delighted to find that a prominent nursing school in the region, Universite Institut Medical Hippocrate, had heard of our mission service. Dr. Dasny Mackenson, HCDM Medical Director, had made arrangements for our mutual benefit, and we were greeted by a group of energetic hardworking student nurses eager to gain clinical experience during our mission week. The student nurses rotated through Pre-Op, surgery, Post-Op and pharmacy and were proud to have participated and receive Certificates of Appreciation for their efforts.



L-R: Kathy Aries, RN, Jean Pierre Fenite, Alliance Cassandra, Anne D'Orvilliers, Toussaint Tenise and Jean Marie Louisa EC



L-R: Anne D'Orvilliers, Alliance Cassandra, Jean Marie Louisa EC, Jean Pierre Fenite, Toussaint Tenise, Michael R. Bourque MD

It was amazing to see this collaboration unfold with no planning on our part and the progress that is added in support of our mission – ***Helping Haitians Heal Haitians.***

### **Volunteers Extraordinaire**

Extra special credit goes to Dr. Soana Laguerre, one of our mission team veterans who is Haitian and just graduated from her residency in OB/GYN at Saint Francis Hospital & Medical Center / Trinity Health Of



New England. I came upon her in Pre-Op volunteering her arm so the student nurses could learn how to start IV's. Thank you for your courage, Soana – Ouch!



L-R: Dr. Soanna Laguerre and student nurse, Alliance Cassandra

And to Dr. Valerie Rossetti, who after much effort over the last 3 trips and months in between repaired the anesthesia machine with the help of Anne D'Orvilliers and our general helper on this mission, James Schepker. This was a feat that had defied the efforts of several others – despite calls to the US, replacement of parts and generally asking for God's help in getting this device to run safely – since the purchase and delivery to Dame-Marie of what was supposed to be a quality refurbished machine. The machine is now ready to be cleared and tested by the September anesthesia team. Let us hope...



L-R: James Schepker and Dr. Valerie Rossetti repairing the anesthesia machine

Note – the red hue in the photo is from garbage bags covering the windows to keep out the heat and bugs. We are told new windows are being installed.

### **While back at our mission house...**

We were pleasantly surprised again to find gifts of fresh fruit and seafood from happy patients. These items are added to the meals that are prepared by the household staff and so welcomed and appreciated by the team.



L-R: Ada, house staff lead, and Monsieur Pierre Antoine



Miller Bellevue, translator lead, with lobster

Everyone involved becomes part of our mission family. Here is one of our cooks getting her blood pressure taken and will have her medications refilled, while one of our translators recovers from local surgery on the last day of our mission, as part of our gifts back to them for their hard work during the week.



Bernadette, house cook staff



Alexis Luxson, translator

### **Serious Medical Decisions**

We had a young boy of five, Wilquens, who Dr. Tom Gorin saw in February 2016 and finally fit our weight restrictions for surgery. He had a double hernia involving his large intestine falling into his scrotum. (Sorry for the graphic picture of his privates but so important to understand the predicament this young boy had endured over at least the last 2 years.) The surgery was difficult and took three hours. Several hours later, it was found he had a complication that had to be fixed and he was returned to the OR. Two hours later all was well, but this reminded us all, as caretakers, how much responsibility we take on when we operate in Dame-Marie. Wilquens was a real trooper through this ordeal and gingerly walked out 3 days later.



Bilateral herna



L-R: Left Center - Wilquen's mother, Dr. Wilkens Gilbert (back to camera), Kathy Aries RN, Wilquens, Donna Jones RN and Dr. Djozensky Mathurin; Right Center – Dr. Wilkens Gilbert high fiving with Wilquens; Right – Wilquens saying goodbye



### **Special Moments**

Another “Michael” was born in Dame-Marie during our stay, which allows us to participate in the joy of a new life, as well sharing positive energy with our brothers and sisters. And then there are the moments shared by and between team members that fuel our spirits.





L-R: Jim Schepker, "Michael" and mother, Ena



L-R: "Michael"'s grandmother, Michael, mother Ena and Donna Jones RN



Dr. Djovensky Mathurin enjoys downtime with a young visitor



Pre-Op L-R: Toussaint Tenise, Sara Bowlann RN and Shawnee Vera RN



Anesthesia L-R: Drs. Benouchea Pierre and Valerie Rossetti



Surgery Soralid Heredia RN



Pharmacy L-R: Ketia Azor RN, Tabuteau Tatcher RN and Alliance Cassandra



Post-Op L-R: Jean Marie Louisa EC, Amanda O'Connell RN and Donna Jones RN

### **Final Items**

The number of patients that have to be turned away always breaks my heart. As word of our program grows, we see patients coming from clear across the route that we travel from Port-au-Prince. They come with very little, almost no food or water and then camp out overnight in the front of the hospital awaiting the chance for a ticket to be allowed inside the hospital doors for medical attention.



Patients waiting overnight

At the end of every mission, the team takes a walking trip to experience life in Dame-Marie and I get to spend some time on the local radio show speaking to the community of our commitment. Hope is a powerful emotion and soothes the weary hearts and spirits, especially when backed by our six years of service in Dame-Marie. There are just two handfuls of us trying to minister to hundreds during our stay and for our personal safety, we ask the villagers and visitors to maintain the peace. It is working in Dame-Marie!



Sugar cane



Local children



L-R: William Burke, local radio announcer, and Dr. Soana Laguerre

This trip I was happy to have our own Dr. Soana La Guerre tell her story of birth in Port-au-Prince, growing up in the US and now her return to Haiti with a strong voice and a stronger message of hope for a better day for her people.

### **The Journey Back Home**

We left Dame-Marie for Port-au-Prince aware of the uptick in violence that had once again burdened the area. With careful planning, we made it safely to our overnight base of Walls Guest House and departed the next morning for the US.



Combined team and family members – L-R: Anne D'Orvilliers, Luckson Richard, Soana Laguerre MD, Stephan Antoine, Pierre Antoine, James Schepker, Amanda O'Connell, RN, Liliana Gilbert, Sara Bowlann, Wilkens Gilbert MD, Shawnee Vera RN, Michael R. Bourque MD, Benouocheca Pierre MD, Kathy Aries RN, Esther Antoine-Dardignac MD, Valerie Rossetti MD, Joseph Glavylove MD, Donna Jones RN and Soralid Heredia RN

Unbelievably at the end of the flight back to NYC, there was a traveler with a cardiac event. The flight attendant asking for medical help was surprised to find a whole team who contributed to the patient's safe arrival in JFK. An expedited landing occurred – a fitting end to a trip that had many unexpected turns and surprises. What an amazing crew of talent to call mission family!





May 2018 team at Wall's

Front L-R: Kathy Aries RN and Michael R. Bourque MD; Back L-R: Anne D'Orvilliers, Shawnee Vera RN, Soralid Heredia RN, Amanda O'Connell RN, Donna Jones RN, James Schepker, Soana Laguerre MD, Valerie Rossetti MD and Sara Bowlann RN



On board

L-R: Shawnee Vera RN, Soralid Heredia RN, Amanda O'Connell RN, Sara Bowlann RN, Valerie Rossetti MD, Donna Jones RN, James Schepker and Soana Laguerre MD

### Epilogue

It is with a heavy heart that I finish this story of our latest mission service to Dame-Marie. While there were many successes on our little scale of events in Dame-Marie, my Haitian colleagues and myself worry about the bigger picture and how will Haiti overcome its troubled past. What series of events will finally allow this country to become a nation that can support its people? I have seen up close on multiple occasions now the desperation of the everyday person, from standing in line after a hurricane with no food except that which is thrown from the back of a truck, to a land of 80% unemployment and no opportunity of schooling for those who can't pay, and for those that can, only commonly extending to the 12th grade. I have no answers, but in my heart I know that if everyone does just a little for the greater good, success is possible. And the proof is what almost 700 missionaries in our program have now accomplished. This mission tale is their legacy and proof of my conviction.

May God continue to bless all our travelers, our supporters here and abroad, and our families, supporters and donors. May you please all remain committed to your part, so we can continue do our part in the field. Thank you all on behalf of those we serve. Amen.

God Bless,

*Michael R. Bourque MD*

Medical Director for MATH Dame-Marie