

**Tortug Airway**

Our trip to Dame-Marie started out with some eventful travel issues. Two weeks before we were to depart, we got a report that there was an engine failure or fire event on the local Haitian air service that was to take us to Dame-Marie from Port-au-Prince. We held our breath as we waited to see if the two replacement engines would be able to be put in, in time for our charter. If the plane couldn't fly, we would have to travel the whole breadth of Haiti by Land Rover to get to our fishing village, an uncomfortable journey of ten hours over very rough roads. We were overjoyed to hear that the plane was put back into service and certified a few days before our arrival. We were less than overjoyed to hear we were one of the first virgin flights. Normally this trip is only about one hour, in blue skies, but with our luck we hit a thunderstorm near Dame-Marie. We landed safely but the turbulence was not just felt in the plane, but in ourselves for a few minutes there.



**Patients in Dame-Marie**

One of the first patients that came to us was a middle aged woman who had for ten years been suffering from the presence of a giant cyst on her thyroid gland in her neck. The village and its mountain surroundings are isolated, and the people have no money or means to get surgical care. So everything we see is a supersized problem.



This patient needed to have further testing before we could safely attempt her surgery. So, she will do the tests and we will see her back on our February 2015 trip to tackle this problem.

One of the most gratifying parts of doing mission service is to see the smiles on the faces of those patients whose lives are forever changed in a positive way by our services. Here is a patient who had a slightly smaller cyst in her neck that had surgery in September. Look at that radiant smile. Her surgical scar is barely visible in the crease of her neck. This smile is why we put ourselves at risk to help those with no blessings in life.



**Special Gift from Two Donors**

Our September and November mission trips are done in the hottest part of the year, where the humidity and 90 plus degree temps are difficult to adjust to when there is no cooling, even at night. So, all our mission members really enjoyed the presence of a new generator at the house where we stay. This allowed us to run large fans during the night to keep the bedrooms cooler. Thank you to those special angels who made this improvement to our lifestyle possible!! And if you are going to do error free difficult surgery during the day, you really need the whole team to be rested.



**Life Saving Blood Transfusions:**

A patient presented this week that had been having vaginal bleeding for the preceding six months. She had walked a great distance to get to us and was very weak. She came with no food and no money but knew that she needed help. A blood test revealed her to be severely anemic. An ultrasound revealed that she probably had a cancer in her uterus. Fortunately, Pierre Antoine our wonderful Hospital administrator and benefactor in Dame-Marie had arranged for the Red Cross to come to this small fishing village for the first time this past September. They had a small supply of frozen blood.



So, the patient was given two units of blood to allow her to have a safe level to withstand the surgery. The following day a hysterectomy was done, which in fact revealed a uterine cancer. It appeared to be localized to the uterus, and therefore this patient not only had her bleeding stopped, but her cancer removed, and her life saved. Very gratifying for all of us directly involved in her care and surgery. And none of this would have been possible but for our presence, and the commitment of Pierre Antoine and his hospital staff to the people of Dame-Marie.

**Special Gifts to Our Cooks**

We are blessed to have a special group of Haitian women who spend the week making sure our team is well fed. Everything they create is from local produce, lovingly prepared, and very safe. The vegetables and fruit are picked off the trees surrounding us, and the fish is right off the boat and just hours new. So, we try to bring them each trip, a gift to show them how much we appreciate their dedication and service to our team. Haitian time is much slower than ours by a good margin. Nothing usually gets started before 8 or 9 AM. So, for us to expect them to have breakfast ready at 6:30 AM, and dinner as late as 8 PM is a real sacrifice on their part. However, we need to take advantage of every moment to render the most care to the most people while we are there. And they lived up to the challenge. So this time a number of team members each brought for each cook a gift that is very desirable. The gift of a queen-sized set of sheets. And they were overjoyed.



Don't be fooled by the expressions on their faces. Haitians in general take their photographs seriously, and they expect to look formal and proper. Not like us goofy Americans with all our selfies and such. And most folks in Dame-Marie have never seen cameras until our presence.

**Reading Glasses are a Hit Again**

Because of the overwhelming demand for the reading glasses we brought last time, we will try to make this offering a regular part of our services offered. Little did I imagine that 200 pairs of reading glasses and cases would be gone in less than an hour on this trip. But to see the joy on someone's face, who never expected the blessing of clearer vision, is a sight to behold. And thank you to our two special donors who gave us the reading glass cases. They help protect the eyeglasses, and life is rough and tumble there, and at this time, there are no replacements if they break.



These women work in the prenatal clinic at the Dame-Marie Hospital. They do have an electronic medical record for the patients that were started by a national initiative. Now they no longer have to squint to read the files.



**An Award to a Special Man**

From these varied images I have tried to present, you might get a little idea of the complexity of the planning and the cooperation of many needed to allow these missions to work flawlessly and safely. And one of the biggest reasons for our success is due to the lifelong dedication of someone who has always had a special place in his heart for the community in which he and his six sisters were raised. Pierre Antoine, his family, and his Foundation have done so much for their community that includes but not limited to the building of roads, several schools, the hospital itself, the sea wall that protects the village against storms, the house in which we stay, the local airfield, and the water system for the whole area, just to mention a few. How many of us could even aspire to even one of these selfless acts. And now he is involved with opening a computer center to help those young men and women in Dame-Marie get post high school training in computer skills. And his plaque for his extraordinary service



**A Young Life in Jeopardy**

Midweek, the Haitian dentist at the hospital, Dr. Claude Lundi, asked us to see a ten-year old girl who had a severe abscess in her cheek. He had been treating her with strong antibiotics for the last several months, and despite that, her infection had spread into her jaw and surrounding tissues. The swelling in her face was so severe and her pain so intense, she could only sip water. So, she was in a severe state of malnutrition. And without adequate nutrition, her immune system was unable to help her fight the infection. There was no local hospital sophisticated enough in this part of Haiti to help her, and because she was poor there was no way for her family to get her back to Port-au-Prince or afford to stay with her.



We discussed a possible plan but found that she had severely deteriorated overnight. The only way to get her to the hospital that could help her was to put her on the only public bus going to Port-au-Prince that night, a ten hour trip, and then another bus for a two hour ride to the special hospital. We donated the cost of this trip 50\$, and the additional monies so that her mother and father could travel with her and have money to eat and sleep 100. \$ Before we left, we had heard that she had survived that long journey. And it was just earlier this week that Dr. Lundi told me the wonderful news that she had had surgery, and was getting the nutrition she needed to recover. Truly a life that would have been lost if not for the small amount of resources we were able to contribute to her care. And that is part of the tragedy that is Haiti. With no centralized system of Emergency Medical Services, everyone is just an individual that has to find their own solution to whatever they are faced with. And for most, there is no money, food, clean water, or proper transportation to make the odds of survival more favorable.

**Our Dedicated Mission Family:**

Once again we had a fabulous team of regular men and women who have found a passion in facing extraordinary challenges to bring comfort to those who lack the most basic services and support. I consider myself extremely blessed to continue to work side by side with skilled individuals who ask for no return or recognition, except for the special smile we see on those we have helped.



**Holiday Wishes**

I hope you have enjoyed reading of life on the mission trail in a land far away that most of you will never see except on these pages. During this past week of service, we were able to treat almost 500 patients who received medical, surgical, pediatric and obstetrical care. 31 of them received expert surgical services. Every one of these folks has their own unique story of their struggle to carve out a happy life for themselves and their families. Mostly fisherman and farmers or tradesman, their life is a daily struggle with the forces of nature and poverty and malnutrition.

Thank you to those of you who have contributed monies or supplies to make these trips possible. We have no bureaucracy to support. Every dollar goes to help those in need. We only give ourselves the necessities to do our work well and safely.

In this coming season of family blessings and charity, we hope you might help us to bring more services to the people of Dame-Marie Haiti, with a donation to either of the organizations below. Thank you.

*Michael R. Bourque MD*

Medical Director for MATH Dame-Marie, formerly Saint Francis IMM



Medical Aid To Haiti

[www.medicalaidtohaiti.org](http://www.medicalaidtohaiti.org)



[www.saintfrancisimm.org](http://www.saintfrancisimm.org)