

Making a difference in Haiti—healing the sick, educating the youth, welcoming the traveler

Healthcare Services at Hospice St. Joseph:

Reaching Out Beyond the Rubble

by Rosemary Edwards, MD MPH

“Bonjou, my name is Gladys. I’m an agent santé (health agent) from Hospice St. Joseph. Do you know about Hospice? May I tell you about our health services...” These words, accompanied by a warm smile are repeated many times each day by Gladys and Hospice St. Joseph’s three other health agents. One particular day in early September, I accompanied them on their journey into the post-earthquake encampments in the Christ Roi neighborhood of Port-au-Prince.

Heavy rains from the night before turned the narrow paths – sometimes less than 18 inches between homes – into thick grey mud. The mid morning sun was already oppressive. I was drenched in sweat and much less adept at negotiating the treacherous terrain. It wasn’t long before my arm, scraped by the ragged tin of one of the dwellings, was bleeding and my feet were caked in mud after I slipped into one of the trenches. At first glance, the sights, sounds and smells of the camp were overwhelming. As a physician and public health professional, I translated the scene into a potential breeding ground for deadly infectious diseases and environmental hazards. Children ran around barefoot dodging open fires. A two-year-old boy with a high fever slept in the dirt with only a tattered sheet between his naked body and the ground. I could find no toilets. I swatted at hundreds of flies and mosquitoes.

Yet despite the seeming chaos there was a routine to the camp. Each home – wood, faded tarp and tin – was numbered. The French and Haitian police patrolled the camp – as a precaution I was told. Most people had electricity and at least one light. Some had radios and listened to music or the news.

HSJ’s health agents, several of whom live in the community, were trained by UNICEF. They know each encounter is a chance to see, a chance to listen, a chance to understand and to reach out beyond the rubble to where people are living and offer hope and help. Gladys and her co-workers didn’t miss an opportunity to teach about hygiene, sanitation and nutrition.

After a few hours I was ready to head back

for some shade and water. The health agents continued into the afternoon with their smiles and messages. During my walk back to Hospice, I saw several work groups organized by international NGOs. Men and women with hard

hats and work gloves were working to clear rubble from the streets by hand and with shovels and wheelbarrows. It is an overwhelming task throughout the parts of Haiti that were damaged by the earthquake.

Health agents continued on page three

A Gift of Water

Purified drinking water a reality at HSJ

Clean water can mean the difference between life and death as the people of Haiti struggle to recover from the devastation of the January earthquake. Hospice St. Joseph has worked tirelessly since the earthquake to try bring basic, essential needs to the people we serve.

With that in mind, HSJ is embarking on an exciting new partnership to bring a valuable commodity to the people of Christ Roi – clean, safe drinking water.

Sunspring Water Purification System is a portable, self-contained solar-powered system that can provide clean drinking water, up to 5,000 gallons a day. The developers of Sunspring traveled to Haiti following the earthquake and have placed numerous systems throughout Port-au-Prince. Dave Jarrett, HSJ board member, read about this system and contacted the company. In the past three months Sunspring has visited Hospice St. Joseph and deemed our location an excellent distribution site.

What is most exciting about this partnership is that the system has been installed at our location at no cost to HSJ. It is a donation, valued at over \$30,000 from GE Foundation, through Innovative Water Technologies (IWT),



Jack Barker of Innovative Water Technologies and creator of the Sunspring system, and Executive Director Max Delices toast the installation of the water purification system at HSJ.

the Clinton Foundation and DINEPA. Jack and Carmen Barker, owners of IWT and the creators of the Sunspring system have made this remarkable gift possible.

All of us at HSJ want to thank everyone responsible for bringing clean water to the people of Christ Roi. This is a crucial step in our journey toward recovery.

Christ Roi's diamond in the rough

Hospice St. Joseph as seen through the eyes of a medical student

By Morgan Mandigo

Morgan is a first-year medical student at the University of Miami. She spent the summer at Hospice St. Joseph, interacting with the students, developing a medical records system for the clinic, and attending UN meetings to obtain additional resources. She hopes to return to Haiti throughout medical school and on a more permanent basis once she is a physician.

I could write pages about all the wonderful things that Hospice St. Joseph is doing in Christ-Roi, but I don't think mere descriptions of the many programs could possibly do them justice. HSJ is truly special – this I discovered during my first day in Haiti, when I had the pleasure of meeting Max Delices (the Executive Director of HSJ). Max shared with me many things he had learned during his years of experience in humanitarian work, including why he chose to work with Hospice St. Joseph. Eager to experience things for myself, I filed these thoughts away in the back of my head, but soon thereafter, I would come to really appreciate Max's wisdom.

While in Haiti, Hospice St. Joseph gave me the invaluable opportunity to attend the UN-

sponsored cluster meetings in order to keep us connected with international relief resources. This responsibility allowed me to interact with the thousands of other organizations working in the country, and it was immediately clear to see that Hospice St. Joseph did things differently than most. A new friend of mine was working in Carrefour, which is a city just outside Port-au-Prince that was also badly affected by the quake. He knew of a community that was desperate for help, and I agreed to use the connections I had made at the UN to find an organization nearby that could help. We made arrangements for nearly 20 children who were malnourished to see a doctor, in the hopes that they would receive some nutritious supplements. What they received was a couple days' worth of vitamins. This is because many larger aid organizations are bound by the strings attached to the grant money they receive. They have specific protocols they must follow to ensure accountability. These children, though showing clinical signs of malnutrition, did not fall within the guidelines of severe malnutrition that enabled this other organization in Carrefour to intervene, and therefore, were sent home, practically empty-handed.

After this disappointing experience, I reflected upon what Max had told me that first day I arrived. In Christ Roi, I realized, this would never happen – because Hospice St. Joseph is there, serving as a safety net for the community. There are many other large organizations working in the area, with bigger budgets and more resources, but each one has specific mandates of intervention, which, unfortunately, leave many people behind. Hospice St. Joseph is there to make sure no one falls through the cracks. I thought about our own nutrition program, initiated because HSJ realized there was an unmet need when we saw malnourished children walking through the clinic doors. Not only did each needy child receive regular food deliveries, but the whole family was provided for as well, with both nutrition and health education. Money is not the primary factor that determines whether or not we can assist – need is. This is how humanitarian work should be done, but all too often, it is not. This is why Hospice St. Joseph, among thousands of other organizations in Haiti, is a diamond in the rough, and I feel so blessed to be a part of the HSJ family.

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Morgan Mandigo, pictured at right with staff members, spent the summer with HSJ developing a medical records system for the clinic. She is a first-year medical student at the University of Miami.

Health agents

continued from page one

A representative from Catholic Relief Services (CRS) showed me several of the *ti* shelters – little shelters – that the organization was constructing for area residents. The shelters are designed to last for the next several years and consist of two rooms with reinforced plywood walls, cement floors and tin roofs. Because of HSJ's long-standing commitment to the community, CRS has asked to partner with Hospice to provide basic services to Christ Roi.

Back at Hospice, the primary care clinic was bustling with activity. The physical structure has changed much over the past year; but the compassionate and quality care that patients receive has not. In the days and weeks that followed the earthquake, HSJ constructed a temporary facility for visiting medical teams to deliver emergency care. In the past six months, with generous donations from individuals and organizations, HSJ reinforced the temporary structure into a fully operational clinic. The staff returned to work as soon as they could and several new individuals were hired to replace those who could not return to work due to personal tragedies. The pharmacy is well stocked and as of August, limited laboratory services are being offered again. Patients are encouraged to attend daily health education seminars while they wait to see healthcare providers.

To truly improve health, HSJ recognizes that they must understand how people are living and often that requires meeting the community where they live. Over the eight months since the earthquake HSJ has organized various initiatives to identify individuals at risk for post-traumatic stress. Psychiatrists and counselors were onsite within weeks after the earthquake and have continued to be available for the community on a regular basis. Through conversation, prayer and art therapy children and adults are gently encouraged to share and process the grief and fear that persist after the tragedy.

After my visit to the camps, it was obvious to me that not everyone who needs healthcare services can come to Hospice St. Joseph's facility. Even though the distance is a few short blocks, there are a number of individuals who are unable to make the journey. They may be the elderly challenged with arthritis, a post-earthquake amputee with no crutches or a mother with four children. For these individuals, beginning in August, HSJ organized two mobile clinics. In partnership with area churches, healthcare services were set up at two different locations in the community. Additional mobile clinics are planned in the months ahead.

Students' well-being a focus of summer school



Through art therapy, young students were encouraged to process their grief and fears. Here, they were creating mandalas on t-shirts.



Education director Erol Ezerbe, right, works with the high school students in their makeshift classroom at HSJ.

HSJ is also committed to strengthening the national public health system in Haiti by participating in the Health Care Cluster Group Meetings established in the weeks following the earthquake. This effort has provided a venue for the many NGO's working in Haiti to share information and collaborate. HSJ is also in the final steps of securing a license (not previously required to operate a health care program in Haiti) from the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) and is now an official UNICEF site for vaccine distribution. As of July, an expanded epidemiologic database is being used and will expedite

infectious disease reporting to the MSPP.

Eight months after the devastating January 12, 2010, earthquake, many things have changed in Haiti. Hospice St. Joseph's commitment to provide essential and quality healthcare services to the Christ Roi community has not. We thank the many individuals and organizations that have generously shared their time, talent and financial resources to help reestablish services at Hospice St. Joseph. We invite you to continue to partner with us in the months and years to come.

Rosemary Edwards serves on the clinic committee for Hospice St. Joseph.



Hospice St. Joseph

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Empowering the citizens of Christ Roi

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.
Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life-
time. —Lao Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher*

Even before the earthquake, the board and managing staff of Hospice St. Joseph had in its long-term plan, providing the citizens of Christ Roi valuable job and life skills.

Our first program, a masonry skills class, was successful. The first beneficiaries of this class included two former HSJ-sponsored students, Rodrigue St. Felix and Frantz Barthold, who had not finished high school. Others in the group were mothers and youth from the community.

It was long thought that to help the people of Haiti pull themselves out of the cycle of poverty they have been in for decades, required giving them the skills necessary to do it themselves. Empowering people means giving them life skills to earn enough money to care for themselves and their families. Besides becoming self-sufficient to survive without being provided for, people earn a sense of achievement and fulfillment. When we teach them new skills, we validate them for who they are and the contributions they make. They know they are useful and valued, and so they gain the confidence to do more.



Students in the masonry class learn to fill, patch and smooth cracks in the concrete.

At Hospice, our resources limit us from tackling every issue, however we will continue partnering with others to bring more programs that help the people of Haiti help themselves.

This small skills masonry training cost an average of \$300 per student, a small investment for a skill that will provide income for the rest of the student's life.