

Mission Highlights

Haiti Mission Trip With Medical Missionaries

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John, myself, and twelve other volunteers with Medical Missionaries, had a successful and

fulfilling trip to Thomassique, Haiti, March 4-10th! We were able to transport 28 large suitcases filled with medication & supplies.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It lacks safe drinking water, has limited healthcare, and nutritious foods are at a minimum. Until Medical Missionaries built a "hospital" in Thomassique, the 125,000 residents of this mountainous region had no local medical facility. Now they can receive



routine medical treatments, first aid, obstetric care (60 births a week!), nutrition supplements, and specialized services from U.S. doctors and nurses. The clinic has 24 Haitian workers that are present year round. Surgery is performed just five days out of the year! The dates of our visit were announced in churches and spread by mouth- some patients walked for days in hopes that their surgery could be performed.

John, a general surgeon, along with Dr. Andy Chung, a urologist, operated on 66 patients, many of whom had multiple procedures. I was thrilled to be able to scrub in with John on a few cases. Surgeries included: hernia repairs, hydrocele removals (some

as large as cantaloupes!), TURPs, and cyst excisions. The clinic had no oxygen, so for safety reasons, we could not operate on pediatric patients. All patients were given spinal anesthesia.

With the exception of one breast mass removal, patients were male, averaging 70 years old. Many of these patients had indwelling urinary catheters for years. Post-surgery, they were able to void on their own and walk out the door free of a catheter bag! Their smiles were contagious!



Our days began in the dark around 5am when the rooster crowed & and the goats started crying outside our dorm window. John and I walked to the clinic with headlamps in place, removed IV, catheter, and drain lines from the 12-16 patients that spent the night, and medicated them for pain. Breakfast was served around 8- warm vegetable/potato stew, hard boiled eggs, & strong Haitian coffee. Then back to the clinic for a busy

morning- patients were lined up outside the clinic gates before dawn to be triaged, and if they were a candidate for surgery, received HIV testing & were told when to return. None of the patients spoke English, but we had excellent Creole interpreters, and a smile goes a long way.

I worked in the recovery unit with one other nurse. Our primary tasks were: keep the patients safe while their anesthesia wore off (paralyzed from the waist down), record intake and output of fluids, monitor vital signs, distribute medications, and get them moving! Thick medical tape came in handy to tie up mosquito netting, make pillows out of paper sheets, and hold the few IV poles we had against the wall. I learned to say, "Do you have pain?", "Move your legs", "Let's walk", and "Did you pee?" in Creole. Family



members were overly supportive, some showing up in groups of 10+, all carrying mini crock pots full of homemade soup and ready to help. There was a short break for lunch and then back to the clinic for an afternoon round of surgery, usually ending at 6pm. When patients were discharged, they either walked home, or rode a motorcycle taxi. How would you like to have groin surgery and then bump along a dirt path for hours?!

Dinnertime was lively and full of laughs, all of us sharing stories from the day. "Did you see the lizard in the OR??" "Can you believe that man has 4 wives & 31 children??" Prior to going to bed, John and I returned to the clinic in our pajamas to make final rounds.



One of my favorite moments of the trip happened late at night in the recovery room. The unit was dark, but there were many voices singing. It was a local minister visiting the patients, and several families had joined hands and were praying together in song. It was a beautiful sound! Another memorable moment occurred on the plane ride home. Seated in front of me were three Haitians and this was their first visit to the U.S. As we drifted down through the clouds we saw lots of snow blanketing New York. The excitement on their faces was priceless! They had never seen snow!

Close to home and far away, there are always people in need. I extend many heartfelt thanks for your donations and prayers!

Blessings,

Schelly Harrison

If you'd like more information about Medical Missionaries, their website is, www.medmissionaries.org.