



The Problem in Haiti

A few weeks following the earthquake at Port-au-Prince I was on an airplane to Haiti with The Hope For Haiti Medical Mission Team. Our five-person team was to connect with the larger medical unit of Hope International in Fort Liberte, Haiti, and help staff an overflowing hospital there.

The Haitians I spoke with on the trip never mentioned the word earthquake to me. They always referred to it as “the problem in Port-au-Prince” or “the problem in Haiti.”

Our team leader was Andrew Putman, executive director and founder of The Hope For Haiti. He is a nurse. Traveling with us were his wife, Kendra, who helped run the clinic; another nurse; and a massage therapist. I served as director of spiritual care and psychological support for our team and patients. We carried with us thousands of dollars worth of drugs and medical supplies donated by Texas residents for the healing and helping in Haiti.

The Fort Liberte Hospital is a small, rather cramped facility doing the best it can with the patient overflow from the earthquake-ravaged area to the south. Haitians who could move north to the safe area to seek refuge and medical treatment.

In addition to the victims of the quake, there were hundreds of area residents who took advantage of the free medical care offered by the Americans at the facility.

The week we were in Haiti our team saw more than 500 patients in an outpatient

clinic where we treated them for a variety of illnesses and dispensed medication and eye glasses brought from the States. The glasses proved to be one of the most popular commodities; we gave out more than 200 pairs.

Kendra painstakingly working through an interpreter to help patients try on glasses until they found the prescription that worked. Some Haitians were able to see clearly for the first time. You could tell when they had the right pair because a big smile would cross their face.

Hope International doctors conducted up to six surgeries a day at the facility. They also set up a large pharmacy that dispensed donated drugs and supplies to the patients. This was to augment the small pharmacy run by the hospital.

We encountered amputees at the hospital who had been sent northward from the affected area. They came to stay with family members or friends and to seek follow-up medical care.

We had the opportunity to meet with Charles Pierre, the mayor of Fort Liberte, to discuss the potential for upgrading of the level of care at

the facility in the future. Mayor Pierre said it had been “his dream” to provide better care for the citizens of the area and to also look at establishing mobile clinics outside of the city extending into the outer areas.

We also met with one of the local pastors, a cousin to the mayor, to discuss training chaplains for their police agencies. The concept of chaplains is somewhat foreign to the Haitians, but we settled on the term of “police pastors” as a way of explaining what could be done. The Haitian police officers are under tremendous stress as they, too, have lost family members but must still function on their jobs.

In my opinion, the media has given Haiti and its citizens a bad rap over the years. I'm sure, like most everywhere else, the country has its problems, but the Haitian people warmly greeted us. They were appreciative, eager to help us, and wanted us to return.

It is obvious the health care system on a good day in Haiti is lacking. And since the “problem in Haiti,” things are worse in many areas. I met few people who had not lost loved ones in the Port-au-Prince earthquake. One person told me that 17 family members had died.

One bittersweet task was to visit an orphanage where we provided medical care and support. Many of the children there, who ranged in age from infancy to early teens, had lost both of their parents in the earthquake. The orphanage is run by Foundation Messéf, whose president and founder is Rev. Maltese Augustine. The orphanage supported 45 children and Rev. Augustine had associates in Port-au-Prince searching for others. He told us he could house 50 more.

We also visited Aslant Youth Ministries, which is headquartered in New Jersey and owns six acres of land outside Quanamithe,



▲ Donated drugs and supplies from Texas residents



▲ Haitians raise their hands in prayer during the first day of a three-day national mourning period on Friday, February 12, 2010. (Carolyn Cole MCT)



▲ Nancy Schraer, RN comforts baby Rosie who was being treated for Whooping Cough at the Fort Liberte hospital



▲ Team member Kendra Putman and Chaplain Fair with children at hospital.



▲ Doctors perform surgery in harsh conditions at the Fort Liberte Hospital



▲ Chaplain Fair says a prayer with Haitians during the three days of national mourning. On the first day, which was a Friday, all work stopped. Businesses closed and the people of Haiti turned to prayer and God



▲ The Hope For Haiti Team from Brownwood partnered with Hope International. Hope International Team Leader Dr. Donald Vargas from Texas with our team leader Shawn.



▲ Kendra Putman and Dr. Fair with some of the many children orphaned by the earthquake



▲ Fort Liberte Hospital

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David J. Fair, PhD, CHS-IV, ACMC-III, holds a doctorate in pastoral counseling and psychology from Bethel Bible College and Seminary. Chaplain Fair is president of the American Association of Police Officers and CEO of Homeland Crisis Institute. He is certified in Homeland Security Level Four (CHS-IV) and certified by the Academy of Certified Chaplains Level Three (ACMC-III). Chaplain Fair has served at dozens of disasters including Ground Zero following 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, NASA Space Shuttle Disaster, Sri Lanka Tsunami, the Ft. Hood shootings, and the Haitian Earthquake.