

Haiti Surgery Report April 2008

How can we describe Haiti and the work of the Surgery team? Words and pictures cannot give a true understanding of what it is like there. We are hoping that sometime in the future you will be able to experience it yourself

The week before the surgery team arrived, the “prep team” went in to Haiti to prepare the rooms, supplies, equipment and patients for the surgeons and nurses. There were 3 of us in that group. When we arrived, we discovered that the container with our supplies and food (which had been shipped last October) still had not made it out of customs. Therefore we did not have as many boxes to unpack and sort as we usually have. However, there was a lot of cleaning and sterilization of packs/instruments to do. There were also post op patients to take care of (these patients had had surgery by the GYN team the previous week). Of course, there were the patients that came to the clinic (ER) that needed some care that the Haitian team could not do. So, Carmen had some minor surgery to do even before the surgery team arrived. There was man with infected and partially amputated fingers that needed to be cleaned up and sutured. There were other infections that needed to be drained and there were fractured bones that needed to be casted. I was a busy first week.

After the surgery team arrived on Saturday, we let them have a day of rest and worship on Sunday. Some of us went to mountain churches that have been started by our mission. I went to the Forge church. We rode the bus for about 40 minutes and then had to walk another 45 minutes to reach the church. It was a beautiful setting, on the shore of the river; we had a wonderful worship service with our Haitian families and friends; lots of singing and only 60 minute sermon. The whole service lasted for 2 ½ hours. We would do well to be like our Haitian churches and not complain when the service lasts for more than an hour. It was very hot, no breeze even though the church had at least a 3 foot opening between the walls and roof all the way around the building. I would say that there were about 80 people packed into the church that would comfortably (??) seat 50 on wooden benches. All in all, we had an exciting time praising God and worshipping together.

On Monday, we started full swing into the surgery schedule. Some of the most impressive surgeries were mastectomies on eroding breast cancers, open fractures that were already infected because the local witchdoctor put some sort of poultice on them and wrapped them in bamboo bark. We did our load of volleyball sized hernias, fixating of bones that had already healed in their fractured state, club feet, inserting supra pubic catheters in patients unable to urinate either due to metastatic cancer or prostate disease. We even did an emergency appendectomy, and a machete stab wound to the abdomen. By then end of the 2 weeks we had done 49 major surgeries and 60 minor surgeries.

Of these patients, the evangelism team spoke and prayed with all of them. And there were 12 patients and some family members that received Christ as their Savior and were baptized. Whether or not we ever see these patients again (some had traveled over 5 hours to get to the mission), we know that we will see them in Heaven.

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Because of the unrest in Port au Prince and some of the other Haitian cities, the roads were blocked by the rioters. They were burning tires on most of the main roads. This kept trucks and other vehicles from coming up to the northwest district where our mission is located. This in turn created a fuel shortage in the northwest. We were unable to buy diesel for the generator. This then, made us shut down the generator for part of the day during the second week of surgery. Therefore we were unable to complete many of the surgeries that we had scheduled. We rescheduled these patients for October. The rioting also created a problem with getting the second group of team members to the mission. There were 20 team members that went home after the first week of surgery, and there were 15 that were supposed to arrive when they left. The ones that went home did get home safely even with the unrest in Port au Prince, but the group that was to come in did not get to come. This of course made us a little short on nurses and other ancillary help the second week. But since we had to shut down the generator and not do surgery during part of the day the second week, we were not overworked like we would have been.

The generator went off in the middle of surgery only 1 time this trip. That was a record breaker! And fortunately, we had a long extension cord that went out of the OR into the hall way and into the solar plug. We had enough electricity from solar to illuminate the head lamp on the surgeon's head so we could finish the surgery with a little bit of light. My monitors and anesthesia have battery backup so at least I could keep the patient safe and asleep during that black out. The sterilizer work well the entire time. That was an answer to prayer also!

Unfortunately, the 3 containers with our surgery supplies, new anesthesia machine, food, and other mission supplies did not arrive while we were there. The customs officials were trying to make the mission pay \$10,000 for each container. But after fasting and praying for 24 hours, they agreed to let us have all 3 containers for just \$10,000. Three days after our team left to come home, the containers started to arrive. Now the mission has food and supplies to last them until the next shipment. And praise the Lord, my new anesthesia machine did arrive in one piece! While we were waiting for the containers to come, we ate a lot of rice, beans, cabbage, and carrots! We are so thankful for our cooks that know how to fix rice and beans and coleslaw in so many different ways!! And we are also thankful our American cook had brought a cooler full of frozen meat, so we did have a little meat with our rice and beans!

The walls, ceiling and roof are finished in the new Surgery suite (we will have 2 new ORs and a larger Recovery Room). All we need to do is tile the floors, paint, put in the sinks, toilets, electrical fixtures, and hook up the new sterilizers. The mission keeps telling us that the rooms will be ready for us to use in October. Also, this trip, the X-ray equipment got unpacked and installed. There were some things missing and we did not get to use the X-ray equipment, but the missing supplies will be on the next shipment. We will be able to have an X-ray department by October!

We continue to solicit your prayers and financial support for the mission and the surgery teams. Please be in prayer about possibly assisting us in purchasing a Medical Waste incinerator for the mission. We are no longer able to dispose of needles, blades, and surgically removed body parts the way we used to. We need a new Medical Waste incinerator to take care of these things. At the moment all the needles and blades are being stored in containers awaiting disposal, and the body parts are just being burned in a barrel. Burning body parts in the open

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creates very odorous smoke and releases all kinds of bacteria and viruses into the air close to the mission. If you can help financially for this project, you may send funds directly to the mission office in KY designated for the incinerator. You will get a tax receipt for you donation. Thank you

We cannot help but praise God for his goodness and faithfulness in providing for the mission and for the surgery teams; for keeping us safe, for protecting the patients, and for bringing more Haitians into God's family of believers.

Carmen Marflak, CRNA
Director of Surgical Services
Northwest Haiti Something very important that I forgot to mention in the Haiti Report.

In previous years we have done MANY amputations of legs, feet, arms and hands. This year, our Orthopedic Surgeon brought 2 people from Phoenix with him that could make prosthetics for these people. You cannot imagine, how many patients showed up wanting new arms and legs. These 2 gentlemen worked non stop. You should have seen the joy on these patient's faces when they were able to walk for the first time in years; they literally threw away their worn crutches. And the ones who received hads and arms were raising them up in praise to God.

Carmen Marflak
Christian Mission