

Northwest Haiti Christian Mission  
Surgery Report/Earthquake Response Team  
January/February 2010

The date January 12, 2010 will forever be remembered in the history of Haiti; how a devastating earthquake collapsed the city of Port au Prince and the surrounding towns; how help from all over the world was sent to rescue survivors, provide medical, surgical, and nutritional aid. Northwest Haiti Christian Mission became involved in the earthquake relief efforts when a small team (American and Haitian) from the mission made the trip towards Port au Prince (100 miles on the back of a truck). They were able to take many of our supplies from the mission to use on their trip.

After this small team returned to St Louis du Nord, it was decided that an emergency surgical/medical team should be called in from the States. Earthquake survivors were making their journey from PaP towards the northern section of the country, to find shelter, food, and medical care. With less than a week's notice, we were on our way through the back door of Haiti. Unable to fly into PaP, we made our way to a small commuter airport in Turks/Caicos, BWI, and from there took a small chartered flight into Cap Haitian, Haiti. This city is on the north coast of Haiti, almost at the border of the Dominican Republic. Cap Haitian is only 70 miles due east of St Louis du Nord, but there is not a passable east/west road between the two points. From Cap Haitian, we had to travel via Haitian tap-tap, loaded with not only us but all of our baggage of supplies in the bed of a small Toyota pick-up. After nine and ½ hours of pot holes, dirty, dusty, crowded, bumpy steep mountain roads, south to Gonaives, then back toward the north to Port de Paix and then east to St Louis du Nord, what a welcome site were the gates of the mission! Was the trip worth it? Definitely; and if asked to do it over again, would we do it? You bet! Let me tell you why.

Mary's roof collapsed all around her. Only a small portion directly over her head did not cave in. She considered it a miracle from God that she survived and with only a crushed ankle as injuries. She traveled all the way to St Louis du Nord before she could find care. You can only imagine how her ankle looked after traveling more than a week without even an Ace bandage for support. Our surgeons were able to do an open repair of her crushed bones. She said that since God saved her life, she would give her life back to Him.

Another patient was a school teacher in Port au Prince. She was trying to get her students out of the building when the earthquake occurred. She was trapped in a bent over position for 3 days when she was rescued. As a result her vertebrae were fractured and she is now paralyzed from her waist down. She and her family made it to the government hospital in Port de Paix, but they were unable to treat her. The Haitian doctor in Port de Paix personally drove her to us when he heard that the surgery team was there. The only thing that we could do for her was wrap her in an immobilization cast, and wait for the fractures to heal. With these types of injuries, we also must help her deal with the consequences of the injuries; the incontinence, the fevers, the depression. Yet, after a few days of antibiotics, IV fluids, and lots and lots of prayer, this school teacher is raising her hands to the Lord during evening devotions and praising God for His salvation and goodness to her.

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Drs Worthington and Shepherd worked for over 6 hours on Alourde. She came to us with no skin or muscle remaining on her pulverized left hand and arm, and of course, infected. After treating the infection with IV's and antibiotics, our docs were able to repair bone fragments, and create muscle and skin flaps to reconstruct the hand. During the evening devotions in the Recovery Room, one can hear her voice above the others!

Then there is Merita. Eleven years old and came to us with an incredible infection in her leg. No broken bones, but the all the muscle and fascia from the knee to the hip was affected. Everyday that the surgery team was there, Merita was taken to the OR with anesthesia to clean and scrape away the infectious, dead tissue, and change the dressings. Every day for 2 weeks, there were 3-4 different kinds of antibiotics flowing into her veins. Now that the team is gone, the nurses that remained behind had to change her dressings daily without the advantage of anesthesia. Merita is healing now: her tissue is beginning to granulate in only because of the power of prayer, and she has been participating in the worship time and Bible studies in her wheel chair. Reminds me once again, that we as a team can only do so much with the medicine and skills that God gave us...God is the One who heals!

Seems like I am sharing so much about our orthopedic patients. I do not want to neglect telling you about some of our General Surgery and OB/GYN patients. The 6 year old boy who arrived at the mission with an infection and bowel obstruction resulting from a previous hernia operation performed in Port au Prince. Our General surgeons were there just at the right time to save his life by performing a bowel resection and removing the cause of the obstruction. Then there were the 5 C/Sections! Three of them done for fetal demise related to the effects of the earthquake. One of the most disturbing events was when a young husband brought his pregnant wife to the birthing center already in severe respiratory and cardiac distress. Obtaining an accurate history is next to impossible. Was she septic as a result of a fetal demise or was there a fetal demise as a result of complications from Pregnancy induced hypertension? We will never know, because she was too far along to properly resuscitate. She and the baby died in the birthing center before we could even get her to the OR. When things like this happen, we so often question God's love, compassion and wisdom. But once again, after the tears have fallen and we cry to Jesus, we must place our trust in our All Loving, All Wise God and allow Him to comfort the hurting, give peace and love to the broken lives, and fill us with His strength to persevere.

For many years there has been an effort by some of our Haitian Christians to have the government grant permission to have a national day of prayer and to have prayer services on the grounds of the Presidential Palace in Port au Prince. Haiti, with the national religion of voodoo, of course would never allow this. However, within a month of the earthquake, with most of Port au Prince in ruins, including some of the Presidential Palace, the government has not only granted permission to hold a national day of prayer, but has encouraged those in Port au Prince, to gather on the Palace grounds and through out the entire country, in churches and missions to hold 5-days of prayer and repentance.

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Beginning on the one month anniversary of the earthquake, all public places in Haiti were closed. At 0700 on the 12<sup>th</sup>, Haitians and missionaries, black and white, gathered for prayer and worship. Some services lasted 5 hours, some lasted late into the night. But I was told that no matter what time these services ended, that at 4:53 in the afternoon, that people stopped whatever they were doing, fell on their knees and prayed for their country, for the survivors of the earthquake and for the future of their nation. God is going to do a mighty work in Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake. I believe with all my heart that God will full fill his promise in II Chronicles 7:14 that God will heal their land when its people humble themselves and pray, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways.

In the midst of disaster, despair, disease, death, God has been with His people. He is bringing hope and healing to Haiti.

Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your financial support towards me and the mission. Thank you for providing supplies for the earthquake relief effort. Without your quick response to the call for prayer and help, this trip would not have been possible.