

Combating the Cholera Crisis: November 2010 Medical Report

For five days in late November 2010, Alison Smith traveled to Jacsonville, Haiti, with the support of generous donors from the Goy Foundation, St. Jude Church in Radford, and several other supporters to assist with cholera relief efforts. In late 2010, Haiti experienced its first cholera outbreak in decades in the aftermath of the deadly 7.0 magnitude earthquake earlier in the year. The epidemic started in the rural countryside and quickly took hold in the whole country, which is especially concerning in the heavily populated urban areas.

Based on reports from Haiti Community of St. Rose (CSR), cholera was rapidly spreading to nearby cities, which was causing growing concern amongst the residents of Jacsonville. It was decided by leaders of Haiti CSR and partners in the US to send a team member to partner with local leaders to help prepare against the impending threat of cholera. Through the help of many individuals and organizations, Alison Smith traveled to Jacsonville from November 23-28, 2010, and brought over 160 lbs. of critical supplies, including antibiotics, oral rehydration solutions, antimicrobial soaps, and hand sanitizers to help prepare the community.

Smith met with members of Haiti CSR in Port au Prince in order to make the 5-hour drive to Jacsonville. Stops were made at the cholera tent at the Partners in Health hospital in Canges and also at the town of Mirablais, where the source of the outbreak was traced back to the UN base.

During the next few days, leaders of Haiti CSR and Smith visited dozens of local cholera patients in the towns of San Raphael and Pignon, which were the designated treatment centers in the area. They also visited families in nearby Matabonite that had members ill with the disease in order to discuss prevention methods and the recognition of additional sick persons to minimize the spread.

A significant amount of time was spent with a young mother in Matabonite whose family decided not to bring her to any local treatment centers because of the strong stigma associated with poor individuals seeking medical care. The family refused to bring her to the hospital despite best attempts by local Haiti CSR leaders. Thus, she was treated with constant oral rehydration solution and the family was instructed how to make them sterilely. She was also treated with a dose of antibiotics to shorten the duration of the infection. Haiti CSR visited her for many days, but despite best interventions, it was feared she would succumb to the disease. However, in less than a week, she was able to walk and soon after completely recovered from the illness.

A day was spent in the clinic at St. Rose clinic educating children how to effectively wash their hands in order to help prevent the spread of cholera

throughout the village. Public health educational handouts with illustrations and Haitian Kreyol phrases highlighting the transmission path of cholera and ways to recognize the illness promptly were posted on trees and buildings throughout Jacsonville and surrounding areas. Early identification is critical to obtaining life-saving treatment and decreasing its spread.

Leaders of Haiti CSR hosted a town hall meeting for almost 300 people in the community to learn about how to effectively prevent the spread of cholera to Jacsonville. The etiology of the disease was explained in detail and then the community was invited to ask questions. Over two hours was spent answering the questions of the very concerned villagers.

The community prevention plan was also reviewed and explained thoroughly. All persons experiencing diarrhea and/or vomiting have to immediately be taken to designated members of Haiti CSR in order to receive oral rehydration solution and transportation to the cholera ward in Pignon.

The final day of the visit, members of Haiti CSR visited over 100 families in order to encourage people to take all the necessary precautions against cholera. Antimicrobial soap, water purification tablets, and educational materials were distributed and explained in detail to every family.

Smith departed for Port au Prince and spent a day visiting tent cities and learning about ongoing relief efforts in the city and surrounding areas. The situation in the city was very chaotic and precarious given the impending Presidential elections.

As of March 2011, the number of cholera cases the country is estimated 400,000-800,000 with 4,000-11,000 deaths (Source: United Nations, The Lancet). Only one person has died from cholera in Jacsonville, thus making the efforts of Haiti CSR at this critical time period a success. However, three recent cases have been report in Jacsonville within the last few weeks and many more cases are being reported across the whole country, reinforcing the fact that cholera will have a strong presence in the town for many years. Continuing efforts must be made to combat this highly deadly disease.

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Cholera ward in St. Raphael Hospital



Cholera ward near Pignon Hospital which had about 50-60 patients spread throughout 6 rooms in a building that was once used for food storage. Nursing staff cared for the patients to the best of their ability with limited resources and support.



Young mother sick with cholera whose family wanted to care for her at home as they felt she would not receive proper treatment in the local hospital. Despite being on the brink of death, she got better from the illness with the intervention and support of leaders of Haiti CSR.



A familiar face to leaders from Haiti CSR. An elderly man from Matabonite well-known to leaders of Haiti CSR. He was very ill with cholera and had no family to help care for him.