

DOC in the Spotlight



Rural Haiti: Focus on Sustainable Healthcare

BY MAGGIE HOPKINS, MD, MBA

SANTE TOTAL SAVED MY life. At the time I was introduced to the organization, I was in a very depressed state: my mother was dying of cancer and I was suffering from chronic health conditions exacerbated by the stress of medical school. I knew I needed something different from the daily grind, or I was going to crash and burn. One day, a good friend suggested I volunteer to provide medical service with a non-profit founded by our friend, Alison Smith, an MD PhD student. The mission was to provide primary care in rural Haiti. I jumped at the opportunity.

We travelled to Jacsonville, Haiti, to run a primary care clinic staffed by volun-

teer medical and public health students, residents, and physicians. Our clinic runs from dawn until dusk, seeing hundreds of patients every day. Patients come from surrounding villages to our clinic for a variety of health concerns, acute and chronic. They pay a small fee, which helps fund the clinic, pays the translators, and gives the patients an appreciation of the value of our services.

The people of Jasonville and the surrounding villages have been so appreciative, so open in sharing their concerns, their culture, and food with us foreigners. I lost myself in the service of others and found my calling in life. To serve my fellow man is the most rewarding endeavor.

This realization has turned my life around. I now have a renewed passion for my career in medicine and I have made Sante Total the focus of many projects. While in graduate school, I oversaw a team of business students to write a business plan and charter for Sante Total, organizing us with an executive board of directors and helping to formalize our non-profit status.

In the last two years, I have gone on three trips to Haiti. The work we do is focused on sustainability. We firmly believe that true health, total health (Sante Total in Haitian Kreyol means “Total Health”) is only achieved through addressing all of a person’s and community’s needs. Food, clean water, education, and economic opportunity are all necessary for total health. Because of this tenet, our focus with Sante Total is as much on community development as it is on treating patients. Dr. Abel St. Amour, an Associate Professor School of Medicine & Pharmacology at the State University of Haiti and the Senior Mental Health Consultant to the Ministry of Health/MSPP – Haiti, applauds the work of Sante Total, stating that: “Sante Total is one of the rare organizations that gets it; whose mission and works put the needs of the people first.”

Providing access to year-round medical care is a primary goal for Sante Total. We are raising funds to complete the construction of a permanent medical clinic building and also to provide a medical education for a local young man, Jose Bien Aime. Jose has been an English translator at our clinic for several years. This 24-year-old man has more wisdom than many twice his age. Despite coming from literally dirt-poor beginnings, his vision is to complete medical school and return to serve as the doctor for the village. He has been accepted to medical school in



Dr. Maggie Hopkins with some charming young men in the future clinic. Sante Total is currently raising funds to build the roof.



Jose Bien-Aime, left, is studying medicine with Sante Total's funding and has pledged to return to Jacsonville to practice.



The corn harvest in Jacsonville was sparse this year.



These seeds have the potential to provide clean water, end malnutrition and poverty in Jacsonville.

Port-au-Prince, and Sante Total is funding his dream into reality. He is inspiring all the children of Jacsonville. Now they see what is possible and they all want to become doctors! Our other current projects in the community include building latrines to ensure proper disposal of waste and cleaner water (even more of a concern with the recent cholera outbreaks). We have also helped to develop public health education to be used in the local school. Furthermore, we are assisting with agricultural projects, because there is no health without adequate nutrition. As Gaby Thelus, the amazing, dynamic com-

munity leader of Jacsonville says: "Food - this is our true medicine"

My most recent trip to Haiti was during Thanksgiving 2013. (What better way to demonstrate thanks for everything I have been given in life than to give back by serving the less fortunate of God's children?) On this trip I had precious cargo: 200 seeds of *Moringa oleifera*, the most nutrient-dense plant discovered to date. There is a world-wide movement to increase knowledge and cultivation of this plant, which grows exactly where people need it the most - hot, dry, underdevel-

oped countries. The leaves are a nearly complete source of nutrition with complete protein. The seeds provide valuable oil and the leftover seed-cake can be used to purify contaminated water for drinking. Our seeds will be planted next rainy season. Gaby's vision is a moringa tree in every yard to provide nutrition for the families, and a moringa plantation to provide jobs and income for the community from this valuable crop.

Our vision of the future of Sante Total and Jacsonville is a self-sustaining and mutually beneficial healthcare system which can serve the community year-round as well as educate our medical student volunteers during annual trips. Thanks to Sante Total, I look forward to a future full of growth and possibility. Leaving a legacy makes life worth living.

How can you help?

Sante Total takes volunteers from all levels of medical training and other professions that may be a good fit for our community development projects. We accept monetary donations, supplies and medicines. Please contact Alison Smith at alison.annette.smith@gmail.com and visit SanteTotal.org for more information.

Maggie Hopkins, MD, MBA is a graduate of Tulane University School of Medicine and Freeman School of Business. She is completing residency in Clinical Pathology at University of Utah. She is President of the Utah Medical Association Resident Section, founder and chair of the University of Utah Resident Interdisciplinary Council, and a board member of Sante Total. ■

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WHAT IS IT?

A new, feature article to appear in each issue of UMA's member magazine.

PURPOSE

To highlight and bring special attention and recognition to any UMA member for anything extraordinary: some high achievement, great effort, prestigious award, community involvement, anything above and beyond the norm whether within medicine or without. We want to spotlight you and your colleagues and share your great stories.

QUALIFICATIONS

Anything amazing! You can toot your own horn or perhaps you have a member colleague who deserves to be spotlighted.

CONTACT

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