

MFP Responds to Health Crisis in Haiti



Port-au-Prince street barricade, February 15, 2019. (Photo by Hector Retamal/AP)

Since February 2019, Haiti has been shaken by civil disturbances. These started in the capital, Port-au-Prince, but quickly spread across the island nation. The unrest began as anti-corruption marches but spiraled into riots, streets barricaded by burning tires, gang violence, and deadly clashes between police and demonstrators. Medicine for Peace volunteers and staff have been forcibly held and threatened by armed gangs at roadblocks, necessitating enhanced security measures to protect MFP workers.

In addition to charges of corruption, the Haitian government has been ineffective in preventing soaring inflation rates, strengthening a markedly devaluated currency, and ensuring a justice system that protects innocent civilians. Most Haitians, struggling to feed their families, are now concerned about protecting them from the violence.

As the violence escalates, **a growing health crisis has emerged** within an already fragile

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Michael Viola MD, Director

public health system. At present, roadblocks prevent health personnel from getting to work and block the delivery of essential drugs and medical supplies, as well as critical food and fuel to the countryside. The result: **we are treating more patients and have fewer resources with which to care for them.**

The Board and staff of Medicine for Peace are alarmed about the worsening political and economic situation in Haiti. We have taken steps to ensure the well-being of all staff and volunteers working in Haiti. At the same time, we are increasing our efforts to deliver high quality health care to the Haitian people who are dependent on us during this crisis.

Women's Health Program Reaches 10-Year Milestone



2010: Community women join with MFP to launch the Women's Health Initiative. (Photo by MFP)



TODAY: MFP Women's Health Clinics have cared for more than 7,500 patients.

On March 8, 2020, International Women's Day, the Alma Mater Hospital and the women of Gros Morne will join the staff and volunteers of MFP in a celebration to mark the **ten-year anniversary of the Women's Health Initiative.**

Ten years ago, MFP nurses, physicians and volunteers met with representatives of women's organizations in Gros Morne to initiate a program to dramatically improve the health of Haitian women. Gerandale Thelusma, the only woman in the Haitian House of Delegates, was present and gave an inspiring talk in support of the program. She pleaded with the women in her constituency to embrace the program in order to prevent the host of diseases that incapacitate Haitian women.

The Women's Health Program has had a number of challenges since its initiation: two earthquakes, Hurricane Matthew, political unrest, and a cholera epidemic that swept through the island. Nevertheless, the program keeps expanding. We developed mobile units to bring modern health care to remote dispensaries. In addition to screening and treating women with

"The women of Gros Morne will be forever grateful for the loving care given by MFP's doctors and nurses."

Elise Dor, Hospital Director

breast and cervical cancer, we developed clinics for patients with sexually transmitted infections and for women in need of family planning. We have established a palliative care program for those patients suffering from advanced cancer.

As we approach the ten-year mark, we have cared for nearly 8,000 new patients. As part of the initiative, we trained a cadre of Haitian health care professionals to deliver high quality medical care. Most importantly, we brought thousands of women into the health care system and provided education to them on how to make healthy life decisions.

The success of the program is a testimony to the Medicine For Peace way: **partner with people working in the community and together empower women by ensuring their health and well-being.**

MFP Completes African Women Study



MFP Clinic focuses on African women who are victims of torture.

Our History. The Medicine For Peace Clinic for Torture Victims at Bon Secours Hospital in Baltimore, MD provides *pro bono* forensic physical, gynecological, and psychiatric evaluations for asylum seekers. For the past ten years, MFP doctors and nurses have documented evidence of human rights abuses in medicolegal affidavits that accompany asylum seekers to immigration court. During the past year, MFP staff have cared for patients from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Guinea, El Salvador, and Honduras.

In collaboration with our partners, the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) and the Intercultural Counselling Collective, we provide social, psychiatric and medical assistance to torture survivors.

The MFP Study. We have recently completed a study of 75 African women who were tortured in their home countries and fled to the United States to seek asylum. The women had been imprisoned in government prisons because of their ethnic origin, their political beliefs, or because they were guilty of promoting human or women's rights. All 75 women displayed compelling evidence of having been tortured and the majority were sexually assaulted while in prison.

The study, which will be released on December 31, confirms the widespread use of rape as a political tool and documents the profound physical and psychological consequences of sexual assault on women.

The MFP study emphasizes the need to maintain a just and compassionate U.S. asylum process to provide a safe haven for these courageous women who have been severely traumatized.



Dr. Michael Viola consulting on patients at the MFP Clinic for Torture Victims.

New Books for the School Year

Numerous studies have shown the strong connection between a girl's education and her future health. For every year a girl spends in school, all of her indicators of health and poverty (e.g. maternal mortality, longevity, family size, earning capacity) will improve. Reaching secondary school has a profoundly beneficial effect on a girl's future life decisions.

The lesson is: **education dramatically improves the future health and well being of girls in the developing world.**

Unfortunately, only 20% of Haitian girls finish grade six. Primary school in Haiti is neither



Students at Foni Bo School in Gros Morne. (Photo by Aileen Reed)



New books to start the school year. Luckily the books arrived in August before the road blockades. (Photo by Pat Dillon)

compulsory nor free. School costs about \$150 per year, a huge sum for most mothers whose major concern is providing food for the evening meal.

For the past decade, MFP has partnered with the Children's Scholarship Fund For Girls (CSFG) to support the education of girls at the Foni Bo School in Gros Morne and to help mothers keep their daughters in school. The CSFG provides books, uniforms, teachers' salaries, and a daily nutritious meal. The goal of the CSFG is to promote the growth of intelligent, healthy young women equipped to make well-informed life decisions.



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