

Delivering Medical Care to a Country in Chaos



Haitian protesters march through the streets of Port-au-Prince to denounce the government's increase in food and fuel prices and the upsurge in gang violence. Photo: Valerie Baeriswye

Healthcare Workers Stand Strong

Since President Jovenal Moïse was assassinated in July 2021, followed by a major earthquake, Haiti has spiraled into an unprecedented political and civil crisis. An ineffective ruling Prime Minister, coupled with a weakened legislature and judiciary, has led to a power vacuum, which has been filled by heavily-armed criminal gangs.

Gang-associated abductions and killings, looting, attacks on institutions, and road-blockades have held citizens in Port-au-Prince hostage. The violence is now moving into the peaceful countryside. The police, with fewer numbers and weapons, have been unable to curb the gangs from terrorizing the capital.

The escalating violence and political instability have devastated the economy. Food is scarce and the price of essential items, e.g. rice and beans,

have double in the past year. In a country where 4.5 million people live in extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition among children is shockingly widespread. *(continued next page)*



Gang wars in Cite Soleil, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, has led to increased deaths, displacement, and widespread destruction of homes. Photo: Orlando Barria

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The resilience and courage of the Haitian health care workers is the untold story of the Haitian crisis. MFP staff and co-workers continue to see large numbers of patients at the Alma Mater Hospital and in dispensaries in remote hamlets, in spite of the danger of travelling deserted country roads. The story of Erlöse Cerfrère illustrates the dedication of Haitian care givers to help people in desperate need.

We were fortunate to recruit Erlöse to MFP, and over the period of twelve years, she has risen from clinic nurse to site manager of MFP programs at Alma Mater Hospital.

Erlöse grew up in Verettes, a small, quiet city of 20,000 people forty miles north of Port-au Prince (PAP). The town is noted for its excellent education system. After graduating from high school, Erlöse entered Notre Dame University of Haiti and obtained a Bachelor's of Science degree in Nursing. Drawn to working with those in need, she took a position caring for AIDS patients in a poor section of the capital.



Erlöse registering women in a rural hamlet into the MFP Women's Health Program.



Erlöse Cerfrère on 91.5 FM promoting the MFP women's health program to the women of Gros Morne district.

Erlöse's life has become increasingly difficult in the past year. She lives at the hospital and is unable to travel to her home in Verettes because of road blockades by armed gangs. On Fridays, she leaves the hospital to go to the open market to buy food for herself and for women in the MFP palliative care program. She is also part of the MFP team that brings food and medication to women in the program suffering from advanced cancer.

Much of Erlöse's time is devoted to assisting the women who rely on the MFP women's health program in our hospital and mobile clinics and most of all, in educating women on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. She often says, in the midst of the crisis, *n'ap kenbe fò*, **we are standing strong**. Erlöse, and other courageous Haitians like her, will help lead Haiti to a better future.

MFP Expands Program to Maternal Care

Working Against Maternal Mortality

Haiti has the highest maternal mortality rate (529 deaths /100,000 live births) in the Western Hemisphere. Approximately one in eighty women will eventually die of a complication in pregnancy. These deaths are preventable because most Haitian women, particularly in rural areas, deliver at home without the benefit of a skilled birth attendant. Difficult mountainous terrain and the cost of medical care also prevent many rural women from accessing a hospital.

Over a decade ago, Medicine For Peace partnered with the Alma Mater Hospital (AMH) to initiate a long-term women’s health program in rural Haiti. AMH provides health care for a population of approximately 130,000 people. The hospital is a 24 hour a day, 80-bed facility that houses an active obstetric unit staffed by physicians, nurses, a midwife, and community health workers.



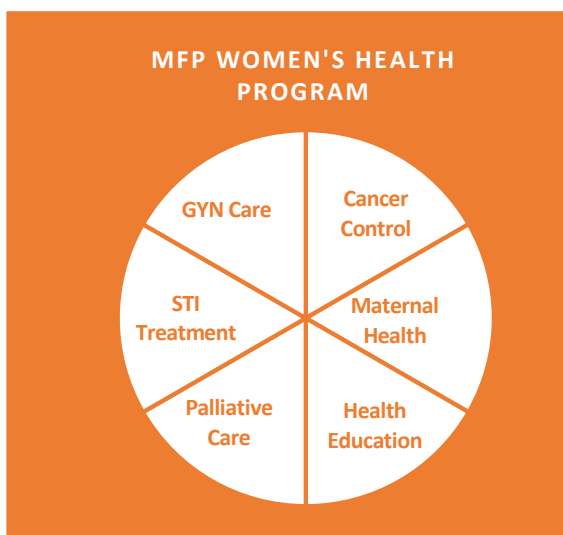
A happy mother and newborn in the obstetrics unit.

The obstetrics unit assists in the delivery of more than 700 births per year, and is capable of handling most obstetric emergencies, including performing Caesarian sections.

The focus of the Medicine For Peace maternal health initiative is to **bring all expectant women to hospital for basic and emergency obstetric care.**

MFP Director, Dr. Michael Viola, said, “We have developed strong partnerships in every country where we have worked. Our relationship with Alma Mater Hospital has dramatically improved the lives of many women in Gros Morne.”

Access to maternal care is one component of MFP’s Comprehensive Women’s Health Program which includes free gynecological care, cancer prevention and treatment, sexually-transmitted infection treatment, palliative care, and health education. **We have brought more than 10,000 women into the health care system.**



The MFP Women’s Health Program continues to expand in the wake of earthquakes, hurricanes and violent civil disturbances.

Country Wide Food Shortages Endanger Children

School Food Programs Threatened



Jacqueline, Marise, and Sherline hope they will have a hot school lunch this year.

Schools in Gros Morne open in October and they will provide a safe space to educate the local children amid the civil turmoil. However, the one consistent source of a daily, hot

nutritious meal for children – the World Food Program school lunch– is in peril.

With lingering high malnutrition rates, Haiti is now suffering from an acute shortage of food caused by inflation, recurrent disasters, gang violence, and a vulnerability to decreases in global food markets. On half of the population is now undernourished and one in five children have stunted growth .

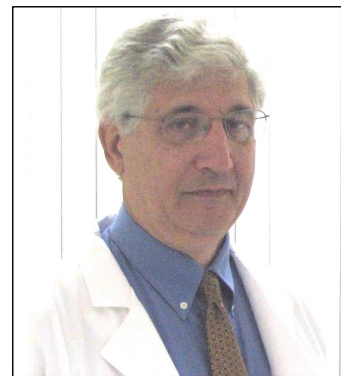
MFP, and our partner the Children Scholarship Fund for Girls, have increased our support of the Foni Bo School and School for the Deaf to cover increasing costs. **MFP targets the poorest students who are more likely to drop out of school early.** Every school day is important, and some of these students will become the future teachers, doctors and nurses, and engineers that Haiti needs to rebuild the country.

MFP's Clinic for Torture Victims Enters 14th Year

More than 130 governments and armed groups use torture to punish and silence people who speak out against oppression, human rights abuse, and ethnic discrimination. An estimated two-hundred thousand torture survivors have fled to the United States. The MFP Clinic for Torture Victims at Grace Hospital Center in Baltimore is working with its partner, Intercultural Counseling Connection, to assist survivors by:

- Performing medical and psychological forensic examinations using international standards (Istanbul Protocol 2022).
- Preparing medical legal documents for courts.
- Presenting evidence-based reports on medical effects of torture.

The goals of our detailed documentation of the



Dr. Michael Viola at the MFP Clinic for Torture Victims.

circumstances and the evidence for torture is to help survivors **take the first step in their recovery** and to **hold the perpetrators accountable for their heinous actions.**