

MISSION HAITI 2017



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Haiti means “Mountainous Country” in *Taino*, from the native population who inhabited the country before European colonization. The name was adopted by its Generals after expelling the French and gaining independence in 1804.



Three quarters of the terrain is mountainous. A tectonic fault runs through the country, causing it occasional and sometimes devastating earthquakes. It is also located in the Caribbean Hurricane belt.

It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Over 80% reside in rural areas, with 60% continuing to live in provincial villages, hamlets and homesteads scattered across the rural landscape.



Natural Disasters

Haiti continues to recover from the massive earthquake in 2010, which intensified existing challenges and created massive reconstruction needs in one of the world's poorest nations. Hurricane Matthew, in October 2016, was the worst storm to hit Haiti in 50 years.

Over half the population live on less than \$1 per day, and about 80 percent live on less than \$2 per day.



- The language spoken by the vast majority of people is *kreyol*, whose pronunciation and vocabulary are largely derived from French but whose syntax is similar to that of other creoles.
- French, spoken by 5-10% of the population, continues to prevail among the elite and the government, functioning as a marker of social class and barrier to the less educated and poor.



Residents attach tremendous importance to the expulsion of the French in 1802, an event that made Haiti the first independently black-ruled republic in the world, and only the second country in Western hemisphere to achieve independence from imperial Europe.



Haitians are a proud people.

Haitian culture is distinct from African and other New World cultures with distinct traditions in cuisine, music, dance, dress, ritual, and religion. Some elements of African cultures survive, such as specific prayers, a few words, and dozens of spirit entities.



Respect

When entering a yard Haitians shout out *oné* ("honor") and the host is expected to reply *respé* ("respect").

Visitors to a household never leave empty-handed or without drinking coffee, or at least not without an apology. Failure to announce a departure is considered rude.



Access to Health Care

Most rural areas have no access to health care, making residents susceptible to otherwise treatable diseases.



Water Shortage

Haiti has the lowest levels of access to drinking water and sanitation in the Americas.



In the dry, treeless areas, houses are constructed of rock or wattle and daub with mud or lime exteriors. In other regions, walls are made from the easily hewn native palm; in still other areas, particularly in the south, houses are made of Hispaniola pine and local hardwoods.



Traditional rural staples are sweet potatoes, manioc, yams, corn, rice, pigeon peas, cowpeas, bread, and coffee.

Although only 30 percent of the land is considered suitable for agriculture, more than 40 percent is worked. Erosion is severe. Real income for the average family has not increased in over twenty years and has declined precipitously in rural areas. In most rural areas, the average family of six earns less than \$500 per year.



Poor sanitation, nutrition, health

Deficient sanitation systems, poor nutrition, and inadequate health services have pushed Haiti to the bottom of the World Bank's rankings of health indicators.

According to the United Nations World Food Program, 80% of Haiti's population lives below the poverty line.



Malnutrition and Dirty Water

Malnutrition is a significant problem. Half the population can be categorized as “food insecure,” and half of all Haitian children are undersized as a result of malnutrition.

Less than half the population has access to clean drinking water, a rate that compares poorly even with other less-developed nations.



Dirty Water

Cholera, a waterborne bacterial scourge that can cause acute diarrhea and fatal dehydration if not treated quickly, has killed nearly 10,000 people and sickened nearly 800,000 in Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, since it was introduced there in 2010 by infected Nepalese members of a United Nations peacekeeping force.

In 2017, as of late February, nearly 2,000 new cases had been reported, amounting to hundreds a week



Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is persistent: nearly a third of the population are food insecure, and of these, 600,000 need external food assistance to survive.

The average number of meals per person is 1.58 per day.
assistance to survive.

Poverty and food insecurity have placed the highest burden on young children and women in terms of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies



Food Insecurity

One in five children remain stunted, and more than half of all children and almost half of all women of reproductive age are anemic.

During pregnancy, only 30 percent of women are meeting the recommended intake for iron; lack of iron intake contributes to anemia and complications for mother and baby.



Religion in Haiti

The official state religion is Catholicism, but over the last four decades Protestant missionary activity has reduced the proportion of people who identify themselves as Catholic from over 90 percent in 1960 to less than 70 percent in 2010.



Voodoo

Voodoo is a system of spirit worship brought to Haiti by slaves from Africa. In 1791, leaders of a slave revolt against France held a secret voodoo meeting in a mountain above Cap Haitien at which they dedicated their country to evil spirits. After their victory over Napoleon's armies in 1804, they attributed their success to voodoo.



Voodoo

Haiti is famous for its popular religion, known to its practitioners as "serving the lwa" but referred to by the literature and the outside world as voodoo (vodoun).

This religious complex is a syncretic mixture of African and Catholic beliefs, rituals, and religious specialists, and its practitioners (*sèvitè*) continue to be members of a Catholic parish. Long stereotyped by the outside world as "black magic," vodoun is actually a religion whose specialists derive most of their income from healing the sick rather than from attacking targeted victims.



Voodoo

As recently as 2004, then President Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest, renewed this vow.

People who practice voodoo believe that everything, good or bad, happens at the whim of spirits.

Illnesses are thought to have either natural or supernatural causes; for example, if the spirits are angry with you they can make you sick.



Voodoo

Since a majority of Haitians practice voodoo to some extent, it plays a significant part in the health care orientation of the population.

North American health care providers need to consider Voodoo beliefs and practices when treating Haitian patients.



Voodoo

How to respond to patients with voodoo beliefs:

1. Provide medical education on the reason for a medical illness at an appropriate educational level.
2. Provide spiritual education (for team members that are Christians).



Voodoo Practices and Beliefs

Gas or gaz is notable to Haitians. It can cause pain, anemia, colic, headaches, rheumatism, back pain, shoulder pain, and problems for women who have just given birth and their infants. It can enter the body in a variety of ways and can usually be relieved by the administration of certain foods and teas.



Voodoo Practices and Beliefs

Perdition is a word used by many patients to explain that they are pregnant for a long time period, up to 6 years; they believe that the devil can hold the baby inside of them. Some may believe it is natural cause of some diseases.



Voodoo Practices and Beliefs

Some patients come to the clinic with a lemon behind a belt on the abdomen of the baby or adult to stop sickness from devil.

They may put teeth of dead people or dog around the neck in a necklace to protect the baby or the adult, to stop vomiting. They also put door key in the necklace to stop vomiting.



Voodoo Practices and Beliefs

Some patients come with a knot in their toes to stop diarrhea. During cholera epidemic, dead people were found with knot in their toes, they refused to go to hospital because they thought they could be healed or stop diarrhea using that devil process. Many people think it's just a social practice or belief.



Voodoo Practices and Beliefs

They complain that Filariasis is a devil attack, and they think that they can be healed using voodoo ceremonies, so they don't go and get medical care all the time.



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Haitians have a very strong belief in God's power and His ability to heal. They believe God works through various media, including dreams and both traditional and medical means.
- Haitians consider health to be a personal responsibility and self-treat as a way to promote health or prevent disease. Home remedies are typically used first before seeking help, and may include herbal preparations, massage, or over the counter medications.



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Haitians only seek medical care when it becomes clear that an illness requires attention. Clinician should ask about what home remedies and herbal treatments the patient has tried. Haitians may take herbal and prescribed medicines concurrently.
- Haitians often use vague terms, it may help to ask, “what do you or your family think you have?” Patients



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Compliance with a course of treatment depends on the perceived severity of the illness. Some illnesses are in themselves severe (cancer, diabetes), while others are perceived to be severe because someone else has died from the disease. The clinician can also tell the patient the condition is serious. The higher the perceived illness severity; the higher the degree of compliance.
- Since pregnancy is not an illness, some Haitians may not see the importance of prenatal care.



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Haitians have a fatalistic view of illness, reflected in the expression, “God is good” (Bondye Bon)
- Whatever happens is God’s will. Perceive illness as punishment, an assault on the body that may have natural or supernatural etiologies.



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Haitian believe birth control is inappropriate and undesirable; consider children to be a blessing from God. Do not recognize male's responsibility in preventing conception. Males believe that condoms reduce sexual pleasure. They are very sensitive to discussion about sexually transmitted infection (STI).



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Natural illness, known as “disease of the Lord” (maladi Bondye), is of short duration. It occurs frequently and is caused by such environmental factors as food, air, cold, heat, and gas.
- Other causes of natural illness are “hot/cold” imbalance.



Causes of/attitudes about physical illness

- Supernatural illness is very serious; Haitians attribute it to the anger of spirits (loa). Voodoo priest must find out what the spirit advises for a cure. A sezisman occurs when bad news or a frightful situation disrupts normal blood flow and makes blood move to the head, causing partial loss of vision, headache, increased blood pressure, and/or stroke.



Causes and attitudes mental illness

Highly stigmatized and shameful for the family. Topic is taboo. Haitians typically believe that mental illness has supernatural causes, such as a hex or punishment for not honoring protective spirits with feasts. Accept treatment and hospitalization only in cases of severe mental problems.



Causes of genetic defects

An angry spirit, perhaps enlisted by an enemy, causes physical deformity. Persons with genetic defects viewed as a curse on the family. Typically receive care at home and sometimes are hidden.



Symptom Management

Pain (*doule*)

Haitian have a low pain threshold and are verbal about what hurts. They are usually vague about location of pain, believing that whole body is affected; because disease travels, location of pain not important.

Most prefer injections, in lieu of injections; order of preference is elixir, tablets, and capsules. They also accept alternative pain treatments.



Symptom Management

Dyspnea

A primary respiratory ailment is “oppression”. Haitians use this term to describe asthma, a state of anxiety, and hyperventilation. Consider oppression like any respiratory condition. Patient says, “I am suffocating” (*M ap toufe*) or “I cannot breathe” (*M wen-pa ka respire*). Offer oxygen only when absolutely necessary, as Haitians associate it with serious disease.



Symptom Management

Constipation/diarrhea

Constipation: Treat with laxative or some herbal teas, sometimes use enemas

Diarrhea: Diarrhea is not a major concern among adults. However, Haitians consider diarrhea to be very dangerous in children and sometimes interpret it as a hex on the child. They try herbal medicine, seek help from a voodoo priest, and, if all else fails, may seek a physician. It is very important for clinicians to assess child carefully because he/she may have been ill for some time.



Symptom Management

Fatigue

Haitians think fatigue signals a physical weakness known as *febles*, caused by anemia or insufficient blood. Generally attribute symptoms to poor diet. Patients may suggest a need for special care – i.e., eating well, taking vitamins, and resting.



Symptom Management

Depression (sometimes *depression nerveuse*):

Stigma attached to mental illness is so strong that Haitians do not readily admit to depression.

According to voodoo, depression indicates possession by malevolent spirits or is punishment for not honoring good, protective spirits. Also may view depression as a hex put on someone by a jealous or envious person.

Clinicians need to be sensitive to root cause of problem and ascertain need for comfort within particular religious beliefs



Lack of access to care

- Most rural areas have no access to health care, making residents susceptible to otherwise treatable diseases.
- In 2003, for example, the WHO confirmed an outbreak of typhoid fever in Haiti that, because of a lack of access to doctors and safe water, led to dozens of deaths.



Leading causes of Death

1. Stroke (12% of deaths)
2. Lower Resp Infx including PNA, Influenza and TB
3. HIV/AIDS (Highest rate outside of Africa. 20% of child deaths)
4. Coronary Heart Dz
5. Diarrheal Dz's (5.1% of deaths)
6. Diabetes (4.9% of deaths)
7. Interpersonal Violence
8. Preterm Birth Complications/Birth Asphyxia & Trauma



Friends of Fontaine

- In 2011, Christ Our Light Catholic Church in Loudonville, New York established a committee to oversee the parish's commitment to build and help operate a school in Fontaine, a rural village in Haiti.
- In 2013, the committee was restructured and became a 501(c)(3) tax exempt Foundation.

Our Team





Medical School involvement

For the last 5 years, medical students from the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biological Sciences have committed to providing healthcare to the village of Fontaine in Haiti. Our intent is to establish regular and sustainable medical care to the people of Fontaine through a week-long mobile clinic that we set up twice a year, while ultimately establishing a permanent clinic with the local provider.



Most recent clinic

Our most recent clinic occurred last spring (April 7th-14th) and was run out of St. Gabriel's school which is sponsored by the American organization Friends of Fontaine. We provided a range of services, including primary care, pre-natal and gynecological care, as well as health education.



Needs for trip

- 2 Doctors were needed for the April 2017 trip
- Since the devastating 2010 earthquake that caused more than a quarter-of-a-million deaths and left the nation's infrastructure in tatters, Haiti has moved off the front page of US newspapers and far from the minds of most Americans.



Needs (cont.)

- Unfortunately, despite major international relief efforts, for many Haitians the suffering continues – especially in the area of health care. Absent a sustained nationwide solution to this problem, small targeted medical missions offer the best hope for otherwise marginalized populations.



Dr. Holmes leadership

- A group of University at Buffalo medical students are committed to providing healthcare to the world's most vulnerable people is seeking support for a medical mission to Haiti under the guidance of our friend Dr. David Holmes, Director of Global Health at the University at Buffalo. Dr. Holmes has many years of experience in international medicine, including time in Haiti.



God's Provision

- Initially the 2017 group had four doctors from the Buffalo area signed up to join them, but two had to withdraw, leaving a critical gap of two open leadership positions to fill. By the grace of God, volunteers stepped forward in time.
- Please contact Dr. Holmes for more information if you are interested in participating in the future.



Mobile clinic plans

- Specifically, our intent is to establish a five-day mobile-clinic in the village of Fontaine, roughly 100 miles north of the capital Port-au-Prince. Currently, the residents of Fontaine must walk more than two hours for the nearest chance of medical care, which is at best hit or miss. At the mission clinic, they will be able to receive a range of services, including primary care, prenatal and gynecological care.



Operational goals

- The clinic will be run out of St. Gabriel's school, which is sponsored by the American organization, Friends-of-Fontaine and where one of our group members has focused much of his work. Our goal is to build a lasting and sustainable partnership between the Buffalo medical community, the people of Fontaine, St. Gabriel's and Friends-of-Fontaine.

Waiting in line outside clinic



Team traveling in our “Cadillac”



Beyond loveable



Real experience



Making new friends



How to do your testing



Buddies



Checking our a heart





Help needed