



10/30/2013

Trip Report

Frederic Wilson, MD

Cap Haitien, Haiti

L'Hopital Justinien

The trip from Port au Prince to Cap Haitien takes about 6 hours by winding seaside and mountain roads. The scariest part of the trip is through the narrow mountain stretches with hundreds of school children walking along roads with no shoulders on the mountain side and several hundred foot drops on the downhill side. I'm still incredulous that no one was hit or hurt, or worse.

L'Hopital Justinien is the university hospital in Cap Haitien which for many years was the capital of Haiti and the site of the French surrender in November, 1803 which turned Haiti over to General Dessaliene and the victorious slave revolt.

In the United States, university hospitals often represent the pinnacle of medical care. In Haiti, however, the university hospitals are chronically underfunded by the government, run down, and lacking in many basic care areas. In addition, they are burdened with receiving the large majority of poor Haitians, as well as acute trauma.

The patient wards at Justinien are as crowded as I've ever seen. Plumbing rarely works and the electricity goes out several times per day, often in the middle of operations.

The orthopaedic residency program is run by Dr. Hubert Pierre-Louis who is the sole attending. He has 8 residents. They have had the SIGN Nails since January and have already done 70 nails.

We have focused on post-traumatic deformities so far. A random gunshot that left a young man with a deformed leg, unable to drive and unable to support his family; a 17 year-old girl with a tibia fracture at age 7 and a 45 degree angular deformity who wants to be a nurse.

On rounds today I discovered that there are over 20 patients in the hospital with lower extremity fractures waiting to be treated. Orthopaedics shares 2 operating rooms with all of the other services so they try to get 2-3 surgeries done every night. That's still not enough to reduce the backlog.

This afternoon I was told that the residents have not been paid their \$200 monthly salaries for three months. The nurses haven't been paid for even longer. The Haitian government allocates only 3% of the annual budget to healthcare.

Yet they all show up every morning with smiles and laughter and struggle all day to care for their patients with their impossible problems, neglected injuries, and deformities. I know they wonder why it

is so hard to get the equipment and implants they read about in the orthopaedic journals, but they carry on and learn to be resourceful and crafty with what they have.

I admire them. I'm humbled by them. I feel privileged to try to be their teacher and colleague.