The Institute of International Health
A world institute for advancing the knowledge of health and medicine to impoverished and developing countries through an active learning experience and research, and making a difference in standards of health practice. ~ Reza Nassiri

IIH Spartan Traveler
The Official Publication of Osteopathic Medical Students Without Borders

NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME, SPARTAN TRAVELERS!

by Prof. Dr. Reza Nassir, Director, Institute of International Health

Both global osteopathic healthcare delivery and global health issues are rapidly evolving. Osteopathic students and educators should promote the ideals of the American model of osteopathic medicine, and meet the challenges of global health by using the principles elegantly demonstrated by A.T. Still. The primary goal of Spartan Traveler: Osteopathic Medical Students Without Borders is to promote the awareness of our global outreach programs among students and faculty. Spartan Traveler will serve as a voice for action to motivate the osteopathic community to strive for improvement in global care, and serve as a guide of health information and resources for MSU global health outreach. The mission of this exciting student newsletter includes:

- Dissemination of information
- Reports on osteopathic global outreach programs/medical missions
- Sharing knowledge about events (medical missions, fourth-year international clinical electives, humanitarian projects, osteopathic outreach programs, and
- Identification and dissemination of the evidence to support and propagate the message of osteopathic care at the global level.

The MSU global health vision recently laid down by Dean Strampel, Associate Provost Hillard, and other senior MSU administrative officials is in line with a development of student opportunities to serve and educate needy communities beyond the boundaries of the United States. Therefore, the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Institute of International Health are proud to launch the inaugural issue of Spartan Traveler: Osteopathic Medical Students Without Borders. We also welcome articles, letters, and reports submitted by the student body or faculty from the Colleges of Human Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Nursing, or any other MSU allied health professionals. We hope this approach will serve as an effective tool to report on MSUCOM global outreach activities and health issues.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Visits:
- Fall 2009: Diane Sabado, rural clinician, Dominican Republic
- Nov.30-Dec.1: Richard Alderslade, Children’s High Level Group, London

Medical Mission:
- December 2009: Nigeria
- May 2010: Dominican Republic
- Summer 2010: Greece and Egypt
James Randolph Hillard, Associate Provost for Human Health Affairs, MSU

We all went into medicine to do our part in making the world a better place. IH Spartan Traveler is designed to let everyone in our community know about new opportunities for us to do just that. Although my everyday practice is all in Michigan, my everyday practice is informed by my experiences with other cultural settings. If you are able to participate in some of the opportunities discussed in this newsletter, I guarantee that your practice will be forever changed for the better. I also guarantee that in a small, but important way, you will have changed the world for the better. That is what medicine is about and that is what MSU is about.

William D. Strampel, Dean, MSUCOM

There can be no doubt among thinking persons that the world is now our community, and that the mission of the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine must expand to include a global perspective. The work of the Institute of International Health will build linkages that magnify our impact, provide much-needed medical care to those most vulnerable, enhance the cultural competency of our students, facilitate international research, and extend knowledge about the qualities of osteopathic medicine around the world.

Donald Sefcik, Senior Associate Dean, MSUCOM

Under the leadership provided by Drs. Strampel and Hillard, and the guidance of Professor Nassiri, our students and faculty, and the international countries they visit, will benefit from these outreach programs.

William Falls, Associate Dean for Student Services, MSUCOM

I believe that it is important that our students, as future osteopathic physicians, recognize the importance of establishing connections with people throughout the world, gain a new perspective on healthcare, and take action to provide healthcare for all people.

Larry A. Wickless, President, American Osteopathic Association, and founding chairman, Osteopathic International Alliance

The AOA proposed the idea of an Osteopathic International Alliance seven years ago. Since then, this group has grown into a coalition of 53 osteopathic organizations from around the world representing US-trained D.O.s, foreign-trained osteopaths, and foreign-trained M.D.s who have additional training in osteopathic principles and manual medicine. I am proud that the AOA is playing a lead role in international health care but none of these efforts would be possible without the D.O.s and osteopathic medical students who have selflessly dedicated their time, energy, and financial resources to advancing quality health care on a global level.

John B. Crosby, Executive Director, American Osteopathic Association

The AOA is playing an increasingly significant role in global health care. Through the work of its Bureau of International Osteopathic Medical Education and Affairs, the AOA promotes the osteopathic philosophy and helps osteopathic physicians gain recognition beyond US borders. AOA members have been increasingly vocal about their desire to obtain international practice rights for US-trained D.O.s, with many indicating they feel that achieving this goal should be the second highest priority for the AOA, behind its advocacy efforts.

HOPE IN A SUITCASE: SERVING HAITI’S POOREST

by Kyle Martin

In January 2009, a large metal gate collapsed on a young Haitian named Benwa, dislocating a vertebra in his lower back. With the help of donors from the United States, Benwa was able to have the surgery needed to repair his spine. A metal rod was installed to stabilize the vertebrae.

In order for Benwa to heal, he was prescribed a weekly regime of exercises. While his family and friends recognized the importance of doing these exercises, they also noticed that they caused Benwa a great deal of pain.

In many areas of Haiti, it’s typical for families to urge their recuperating relatives to move as little as possible. This practice, combined with the pain that Benwa seemed to be experiencing, kept his family from pushing him to finish his exercises. As a result, Benwa’s back wasn’t healing correctly. If something wasn’t done quickly, the damage might become irreversible.

Fearing this outcome, the physicians at the Christianville Clinic (Clinique Médicale de Christianville) sent a staff member to work with Benwa three days a week.

As part of their week-long trip to the clinic, third-year MSUCOM students Daniella Frank, Amanda Freschauf, and Alicia Bennett were able to pay a visit to Benwa’s house and assist with his weekly exercises. Dr. Robert Vermaire, a family physician from Fruitport, Michigan, accompanied the students as they worked with Benwa, providing them with the direction to complete their task.

Daniella, Amanda, and Alicia were part of a seven-person medical mission trip to Haiti in March. Dr. Vermaire and his wife, Marsha, who had worked as missionaries in Haiti during the 1980s, were also a part of the trip. Second-year students Hope Vermaire and Kyle Martin rounded out the group.

The students and Dr. Vermaire spent the week assisting in the Christianville Clinic, a small clinic about an hour outside of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. The clinic employs three Haitian physicians as well as an American doctor and physician assistant. On average, the clinic sees about 125 patients a day, offering free services to those who cannot afford to pay.

In May, another group of MSU students arrived to assist at the Christianville Clinic. This time, the group consisted of five students from the MSU College of Human Medicine, an anthropology Ph.D. student, as well as MSUCOM second-year students Yvette Gross and Kyle Martin.

During their time in Haiti, each of these students was exposed to cases that they might rarely, if ever, see in the United States. In
addition, due to the small size of the clinic, students were able to work one-on-one with staff members. This meant that they could learn directly from their instructor.

Students were encouraged to explore the community surrounding the clinic. Beautiful mountains loom throughout the countryside. During their stay, the students prepared popcorn and delivered it to children in nearby villages. The children were overjoyed as they shoveled the popcorn into their faces.

The current health care situation in Haiti is dire. Malnutrition is rampant and HIV/AIDS continues to ravage the country. Specialists, especially surgeons, are nearly impossible to find.

Because of medical mission trips like those in March and May, students at MSUCOM are having informative international experiences while serving the global community. As the world grows more interconnected, these experiences are becoming an integral part of medical education.

Primary care is a need that extends across the globe. With trips to Haiti, Peru, and Guatemala, MSUCOM can lead the way in providing this service while spreading the benefits of osteopathic medicine.

FROM SNAKEBITES TO LEPROSY: A MEDICAL MISSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

by Gloria Lam and Sahar Eftekhar

Working with Dr. Nassiri, students Gloria Lam and Sahar Eftekhar planned the May 9-16 Dominican Republic Medical Mission, with assistance from local preceptors Drs. Diane and Francisco Sabado. They recruited 16 motivated and compassionate students to participate.

At the Robert Reid Pediatric Hospital in Santo Domingo, students observed children with common, rare and endemic medical conditions. In one case, a boy with hydrocephalous, common in the Caribbean, was compromised by chronic malnutrition. A seven-month-old girl with cardiomegaly and patients with bacterial meningitis, rare in the US, were also seen. At the Diabetes Endocrinology and Nutrition Institute, the students saw a woman who presented with ulcers on her feet, a fifth toe amputation and a beginning of retinopathy. Her history showed that her traditional diet of root vegetables and fruits was not beneficial to her condition. One evening students were given the opportunity to moonlight a shift at the Marcelino Velez Regional Hospital, where they monitored contractions and assisted in delivery in OB, took histories, examined x-rays and weighed pediatric patients, and learned suturing.

The team also set up rural clinics outside Santo Domingo to provide free health care to those without means. For three days, students saw cases ranging from sore throats and ear infections to parasites, snake bites and perforated ear drums. Students also applied osteopathic manual medicine on patients with back pain. At a leprosy clinic, where patients were isolated from society, students interacted with them and learned about their illness despite the cultural stigmas. In these rural areas, persons waited patiently for their turns despite the uncomfortable heat. They did not see these health care visits as a right but as a privilege. The locals expressed their gratitude with words, embraces, and even home-cooked meals each day the medical mission team saw patients.

Supplementing the clinical experiences, Dr. Nassiri gave five two-hour lectures on pharmacology to the students.

Led by student Mayo Mitsuya, a committee collected substantial numbers of diapers, toothpaste, toothbrushes, sneakers, clothing, washcloths and towels, baby formula, toys, fabric and yard. They also raised $1,000 and purchased rice, beans, diapers, formula, baby food, cooking oil, chalkboards, wafers, milk and vaccines for children with sickle-cell disease. The items were distributed to a rural school, a refugee camp, and a family with an HIV-positive child.

Students who participated in the mission returned with incomparable professional and personal experiences, honing clinical skills, learning tropical medicine, and learning from patients how different and similar the Dominican people and culture are to their counterparts in the United States.
SMALL ACTS, LIFE-CHANGING IMPROVEMENTS
IN PLAYA DEL CARMEN

by Lawrence Prokop, D.O.

For five years, Lawrence L. Prokop, D.O., Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, has joined with Peter R. Lapine, Ph.D., Department of Speech and Language Pathology, to work at Angel Notion, a free clinic for the native population of Playa del Carmen, Mexico. Dr. Lapine has taken more than 35 mission trips there to treat patients and to train graduate students and local medical and paramedical professionals in communication disorders. Since 2003, Dr. Prokop has been evaluating and treating musculoskeletal and neurological injuries at the clinic.

This year, March 7-14, Dr. Prokop took third-year osteopathic student Nicole Szell and third-year medical student Jennifer Wong-Sick-Hong to work in the clinic. In collaboration with Dr. Gabriel Ayala and Dr. Laura Roa from Angel Notion, Dr. Prokop’s team instructed the communication therapists in the medical aspects of their patients. A focal point was treatment for spasticity, a frequent side effect of head injuries, spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy and other neurological illnesses; it can impact hygiene, bathing, dressing and mobility. Because of the poverty in the area, phenol neurolysis proved the most feasible treatment and the team brought the equipment needed and trained Drs. Ayala and Roa in its use.

Though the team treated patients with head injuries and strokes, the most touching case was that of a seven-year-old boy born with hydrocephalus who had been left with a hemiparesis and spasticity. His right foot was stuck in 30 degrees of plantar flexion, pointed down, making walking difficult and running almost impossible. The instant they placed him on the exam table, he began to scream. They employed phenol neurolysis as fast as they could safely, and in 15 minutes his foot gained range of motion to neutral. When he saw that, he stopped screaming and stared at the foot. His mother was amazed at seeing her son move his ankle for the first time in seven years. He then spent the next hour running up and down the hall.

They had the opportunity to teach the osteopathic approach, including medical reasons for treatment and different techniques. These techniques were compared with and complemented by the neural therapy that Dr. Roa taught them. This is a technique of injecting small amounts of local anesthetic subcutaneously into tender points and painful areas. These two techniques appear to work together to improve the patients’ pain complaints and biomechanical problems.

Dr. Prokop noted that “The townspeople of Playa del Carmen have always been wonderful to us. From supplying hotel rooms to hosting us for meals to climbing palm trees so that the Americans can have fresh coconut milk to drink, we have been treated with great kindness. The cultural experience has been as rewarding as the medical experience.”

NEW PERSPECTIVES: 2009 DOCARE GUATEMALA MEDICAL MISSION

by Jeff Magnatta, Rebecca Moller, and Tiffany Jarois

Trips like this have a unique effect; those participating, I, Jeff, have a pre-med student, four trips to Antigua, Guatemala, stimulated my interests in the art and practice of osteopathic medicine; as an osteopathic student, I was inspired to paint a clinical picture.

Rebecca and I were just a small component of a large team that consisted of osteopathic students, physicians, and volunteers who assembled for a common goal. Rebecca was profoundly proud yet brokenhearted to employ her newly acquired genetics knowledge when she diagnosed an infant with Downs syndrome. Tiffany was thrilled to be given the opportunity to improve her OB/GYN physical exam skills. These and many other opportunities to practice deepened our understanding and improved our confidence in our clinical skills.

These trips are fulfilling and enlightening in a multitude of ways and it seems that each participant has different reasons for traveling thousands of miles to practice osteopathic medicine in a rural volunteer clinic. Some hesitantly join a companion to an exotic land, yet others dive into a foreign culture with little apprehension. Some may simply want more hands-on experience, while others may seek mentoring from senior colleagues. No matter the individual’s reasons, the common thread is clear: everyone has come to lend a hand to their fellow humans.

“I anxiously open my eyes, well before my alarm clock rings. I am tired, but I can’t go back to sleep. There are too many thoughts running through my head and I start to convert them into Spanish. I am a first year medical student on my first medical mission. I am here to help translate as well as treat patients. Soon we are loading the bus with seemingly countless bags filled with medications. Staring at a volcano off in the distance, I smile inside and know this is going to be a magical trip. Realization sinks in: I am no longer in East Lansing.”