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Fall 2017, A Summer of New UNH International Program, UNH Students Bring Hope to Togo

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UNH Global

UNH Students Bring Hope to Togo

Bill Maddocks, Clinical Assistant Professor, Center for Social Innovation and Enterprise CSIE)

Monday, October 30, 2017



Togo bordered by Ghana on the west and Benin on the east

Togo is a small West African country with a mostly-rural population of approximately 7 million. According to UNICEF, 81.2% of Togo's rural population lives below the poverty line. For many rural Togolese, a trip to a medical clinic can be a three-day walk. Once at the clinic, services are often limited and medicine in short supply. To change this reality, a Nebraska-based program called Global Partners in Hope (GPIH) is developing five regional health centers, delivering real,

sustainable hope to the rural people of Togo.

This summer, thanks in large part to a grant from the UNH Emeriti Council, three UNH students had an opportunity to assist in this effort. Kiley McKenna (Nursing '18), Elizabeth Lapsley (Nursing '18), and Aboubacar Konate (Civil Engineering '17) participated in a ten-day GPIH mission to conduct a needs assessment of the health of the rural community surrounding the village of Agbelouve. GPIH uses a unique hub-and-spoke, social franchising model to deliver a wide range of health care services: A main hospital is built in a central location such as Agbelouve, and then several smaller community clinics are set up a day's walk away to serve local medical needs that do not require the

more comprehensive services found at the hospital. Each small community clinic is run by a nurse and operated as a franchise of the main hospital.

The UNH students were expecting to be involved in a data collection process and did not realize the full extent of their role at the medical clinics. On the first clinic day, they saw and treated approximately 500 children with varying diagnoses including malaria, scabies, worms, hydrocephalus, osteomyelitis,



Kiley McKenna (wearing wide blue headband) and Elizabeth Lapsley (wearing narrow pink headband) treating young children in the village clinic

abscesses, sickle cell disease, and severe anemia. McKenna and Lapsley were able to assist with wound care, antibiotic injections, gastrointestinal worm treatment, tinea capitis treatment, dental and medical referrals, and heart murmur detections. During the visits, Abou Konate, the engineering student team member and a native of nearby Guinea, assisted the nursing students by taking the weights and heights of children and providing indispensable French language and West African-U.S. cultural interpretation between the local patients and U.S. nursing students. With his engineering background, Konate also advised on the construction of the hospital, consulting with the lead engineer on the structural design of the site. “This is an amazing project” Konate remarked. “We could use a hospital like this where I come from in Guinea.”

It was difficult knowing they could not treat all the children seeking assistance, as some of their diagnoses were far too severe to treat at these mobile clinics. For many other children, the treatment was equivalent to a band-aid in the scheme of things. As McKenna asks “Who will be there next week when they need additional treatment? Or the week after that?” The experience made her realize,



(l. to r.) Elizabeth Lapsley, Aboubacar Konate, and Kiley McKenna holding GiPH banner

abscesses, sickle cell disease, and severe anemia. McKenna and Lapsley were able to assist with wound care, antibiotic injections, gastrointestinal worm treatment, tinea capitis treatment, dental and medical referrals, and heart murmur detections. During the visits, Abou Konate, the engineering student team member and a native of nearby Guinea, assisted the nursing students by taking the weights and heights of children and providing indispensable French language and West African-U.S. cultural interpretation between the local patients and U.S. nursing students. With

“how important it is for these children to have access to full-time medical care. We found it comforting knowing that GPiH will soon be providing many of these children with permanent access to healthcare services.”

In addition to volunteering on clinic days, the UNH team participated in the health needs assessment work as planned and assisted with a midwifery course, helping current midwives enhance their ability to train others. McKenna explains, “We were able to give each midwife the tools necessary to provide continuing education at their own clinics.” Teaching this course demonstrated how knowledgeable the medical professionals were and reminded them that they were not there to change the way they perform maternal and newborn care, but to give them the tools to teach others. The first several minutes after a delivery are crucial and the Helping Babies Breathe training course has helped to dramatically decrease maternal and newborn death worldwide.

The host organization GPiH truly made this experience meaningful for the students. “We were able to see the medical, business, and engineering sides of a health project in a developing country, and understand its lasting impact,” says Elizabeth Lapsley. “Exposure to the clinics showed us the necessity of access to medical care in this region, and visiting the orphanages reiterated the need for more vigilant and accessible maternal postpartum care.”

The service-learning visit to Togo was funded by a grant from the UNH Emeriti Council International Service Initiative Fund (</global/unh-emeriti-council-student-international-service-initiative-grant>) and the UNH Nursing Department. Bill Maddocks was the faculty advisor. We are very grateful to Mr. Mel Rines, and the members of the Emeriti Council, whose generous support made this mission of hope possible.

Here is a short video of the Togo Hope Mission (<https://youtu.be/hdrK1NPZulg>).

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