

No Week at the Beach



Haiti medical mission is medicine for patients and the CBU students who helped them

BY JOHN KERR

ONE OF THE SPECIAL GIFTS THAT STUDENTS AT Christian Brothers University students have always had is the gift of wanting to help others. The Lasallian spirit of values-rooted education combined with the commitment to serve others is very much alive in CBU students today.

Four biology students of Brother Edward Salgado headed for the islands this past October for fall break, but not to lounge around on a sandy beach. The island they chose to visit was Haiti—one of the poorest nations in the world, where improving medical care is a special focus by some spirited physicians and medical professionals.

During this year's fall and spring breaks, six CBU students are spending more than a week in Port Au Prince working at a medical clinic for the poor. This story is about the first four.

"As soon as we announced the annual fall and spring break project, students jumped to sign up," says Brother Edward. "That's a special commitment because this week on a Caribbean island is certainly not a week at the beach."

The fall trip was held October 12-20, and the spring trip is planned for March 15-23, 2003. The project is directed by Dr. Gordon Kraus, a staff physician at St. Francis Hospital in Memphis and president of the Haiti Medical Missions of Memphis. "Haiti Medical Missions is privileged and delighted to help contribute to the education of health science students at

CBU," says Kraus. "We know the students bring the spirit of CBU to the people of Haiti."

Haiti Medical Missions of Memphis includes physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmaceutical representatives, and other medical and health care professionals. The organization was established in 1997 as a parish health ministries outreach program for the Church of the Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Memphis. Patrick Moynihan, a former parishioner, was named director of L'Ouverture Cleary, an orphanage and school for Haitian children just outside Port Au Prince. Medical trips have been conducted each year, and a permanent clinic was established in 2001.

"These trips are invaluable to our students," says Brother Edward. "They will assist doctors and nurses at a clinic in Port Au Prince, and help care for some of the poorest people in the city."

Students take patients' vital signs, help distribute medicine, and prepare and maintain medical charts. Most of the students who volunteer for the mission work are already determined to go to medical school or nursing school, or have a broad interest in health sciences careers.

Four students, all seniors majoring in biology, made the mission trip this fall. They were Nina Addison, Scott Adelman, and Andrew Asbury, all from Memphis, and Edin Basic, from Bosnia.

"I had always heard about the poverty and lack of health care in Haiti, and wanted to offer any help possible. I knew it would be a great learning experience mentally, emotionally, and spiritually," says Adelman. "People have always told me that visiting a

Opposite page, left: Edin Basic observes as Dr. Alan Hammond and nurse Genie Ashworth perform surgery. Opposite page, right: The team arrives in Haiti: (l-r) Hammond, Scott Adelman, Dr. Gordon Kraus, Basic, Andrew Asbury, Nina Addison.



Above left: The student team listens and observes in the clinic waiting room. Above right: Adelman and Asbury consult with a patient.

third world country was life-changing, and I really wanted to understand this firsthand.”

“I signed up primarily to satisfy my own curiosity, but also to contribute my part to the underlying idea of the mission—to make this world a smaller and healthier place,” says Basic. “Born in Bosnia and raised in Germany, I was exposed to medicine and the way it is practiced across Europe and here in the United States. Going to Haiti was something entirely new, due to the economical and political difficulties that country has been experiencing for several decades.”

Asbury volunteered for the mission to expand his view of the world. “I wanted to experience life in another country since I have never been out of the United States,” he says. “Having heard about the country and its poverty, I was curious about the lives of the people and how they live in a world completely different from our own. Also, I was spurred on by the fact that we would be working in a clinic, and I previously had no medical experience. Since I am applying to medical school, I thought the trip would help me choose which field of medicine I would pursue.”

Nina Addison had yet another motivator for signing up for the mission. “I’ve always wanted to become a doctor and to be able to serve those less fortunate,” she says. “Kindness and compassion are important characteristics in being a good physician, and having an opportunity to work with the people of Haiti was a perfect opportunity to experience so much.”

Adelman knew that it would be quite a different living situa-

tion than anything he had seen in the United States. “The most difficult thing for me was seeing the horrible living conditions and wondering what else could be done to help these people,” he says. “It will take decades and hundreds of millions of dollars to turn Haiti into a modern, industrial country. It was hard to accept how different it was from our sheltered lives. You are overwhelmed with sympathy for the people of Haiti, and you try to reason with yourself that it could be worse, but then you realize that it could not be much worse.”

Although poor and neglected in many ways, the spirit of the Haitian people was something all the students noted.

“The one thing that struck me the most was the fact that, despite all the poverty, people seemed so emotionally well off,” Basic observes. “It reminded me of Bosnia during the civil war, when just surviving another day put a big smile on your face despite all the problems. It was amazing to see the conditions many Haitian people live in and realize that they are still full of hope and never ready to give up.”

While working in the clinic, the students were not only able to learn more about the medical profession and the life of dedicated physicians and nurses, but they also learned even more about how small things can make a difference not only in the lives of those they were helping, but in their own lives.

“Each day we worked with a different specialty group at the clinic,” Addison recalls. “One day in pediatric care a small child

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CBU's
MIRT
project
branches
out from
Brazil to
Uganda



Research Site-seeing

◀ Dr. Janet McCord (right) with Daniel Kakunta, director of the Ishaka Health Plan, and students in Uganda.

▶ Lachre Brown ('03) in Dr. Toldeo's lab in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

BY LISA BELL

LAST SUMMER, WHEN MOST STUDENTS AND FACULTY were enjoying vacations and trying to forget about school, Drs. Malinda Fitzgerald, CBU associate professor of biology, and Janet McCord, assistant professor of religion and philosophy, were sweating through hot temperatures, practicing diplomacy with the nationals, learning cultural nuances, and supervising eager students working in Brazil and Uganda. The natural beauty of these countries seen in the photos and postcards sent home belies the months of preparation —bioethics seminars, language classes, and refining research techniques before they even left home.

Fitzgerald, McCord, and their cadre of students were working during the second summer of the Minority International Research Training (MIRT) project, funded by the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Awarded in 2000, the \$500,000 grant was the result of a successful consortium of CBU, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital International Research Program, and Tennessee State University. The purpose of the grant is to recruit and train minority undergraduate students for careers in biomedical science and research. Raising awareness of international research issues and opportunities, the program introduces students to a variety of biomedical and research careers, encourages them to seek advanced degrees, and exposes them to minority health issues. Further, the MIRT project provides training and research opportunities for the faculty sponsors.

Each January the MIRT project recruits 10-12 students from CBU and surrounding colleges. In addition to their normal classes, students make the commitment to attend language (Portuguese) and research classes, a bioethics seminar, and a team-building workshop as preparation for their summer internships.

Fitzgerald is enthusiastic about the positive outcomes of the

MIRT project: "Students have the advantage of learning valuable research and clinical skills in an international setting. Unlike the modern medical facilities we have in the United States, students must work with limited resources in an international, often rural environment. Over the summer, they get to know the people, learn about cultural differences and social classes, and witness firsthand the unfortunate disparities in health care for the rich and poor. And while Africa and Brazil may be a continent away, the issues of minority, rural health care are just as real there as they are in any rural American community."

Last summer, students were divided into teams and assigned to projects in Sao Paulo and Florianopolis in Brazil and Uganda. Two teams worked on separate projects at City University of Sao Paulo. While one team conducted vision research under Brazilian mentor Dr. Claudio Toledo, the other team studied the role of glutamate and calcium expression in the developing nervous system under the direction of Dr. Luiz Britto.

Meanwhile, Florianopolis, which replaced the previous year's Recife site, was the staging for aquatic environmental research under the watchful eyes of Dr. Maria Risoleta Marques whose students examined the expression of heat shock proteins (HSP) in bivalves as an indication of environmental pollution. In addition, a study on learning and memory acquisition was supervised by Dr. Antonio de Padua Carobrez.

The addition of Uganda as a research site was due to quick negotiations and networking by Dr. Janet McCord. McCord and her husband are returned Peace Corps volunteers who served in Zaire in the 1980s. Michael oversaw FINCA's village banking program, a loan program for the working poor, and later designed a micro-insurance program for these poor, entrepreneurial clients. His current work as an international consultant developing health-care financing strategies in developing counties, including

Uganda, helped to secure the Uganda site.

Over the summer, McCord's students interviewed families in Ishaka and Kampala for a qualitative study, "An Operative Ethic of Health Care Distribution in Uganda," looking at attitudes toward health care for working poor families in those towns. The NIH was so impressed by the bioethics research conducted by the team, that they awarded an additional and unsolicited \$50,000 to the MIRT project for the 2002-2003 year.

MIRT's momentum continues to build as Fitzgerald and McCord prepare for the summer of 2003. Joining them as faculty mentors will be Teri Mason, a professor of anthropology at CBU, and Christina Blanchard-Horn, a medical anthropologist from the University of Memphis. Blanchard-Horn is completing doctoral work in health-care research. Mason, who is completing her doctorate, has a particular interest in rural health care issues.

They will work with McCord in Uganda on two separate but related projects: the micro-care study and the bednet study. Conducted in Kisiizi, Kampala, and Ishaka, the micro-care study will determine if self-employed workers in rural Uganda who are participating in health-care financing programs (micro-insurance) have better health-care outcomes than those who do not. The bednet study, conducted in Kisiizi and Ishaka, will look at appropriate malaria prevention education strategies, targeting users of provider-based and managed-group health-care financing programs in Uganda. Researchers will work with Microcare Ltd. and the Ishaka Hospital Health Plan.

The Sao Paulo projects, under Drs. Luiz Britto and Claudio Toledo, will continue next summer. University of Tennessee instructor and research nurse director Risa Ramsey, whose students will study the utility of a cardiodynamic monitoring system to distinguish between false and true labor, will direct a new project. Ramsey explains the importance of this study: "The inability to determine if a pregnant woman is in labor can lead to maternal and fetal morbidity. Therefore, we hope this investigation will lead to the development of a screening tool to determine which patients are in false versus true labor." Ramsey and her students will work with patients from three Sao Paulo hospitals.

Also proposed for 2003 is the carnivore conservation project in Emas National Park, Brazil. At this writing, a faculty sponsor for this site had not been confirmed. Research would include radio and camera tracking of jaguars, pumas, white-lipped peccary, tapirs, and other medium-large mammals; capturing and collecting blood samples of small carnivores, especially crab-eating foxes; and analyzing scat and kill collections.

While the MIRT project has not been a vacation for the students and faculty the past two summers, all agree that the internships have been experiences of a lifetime. Not only are participants honing research skills and getting invaluable hands-on biomedical experience, but students and faculty alike are getting to know fellow researchers and the clients they serve, learning about nuances in Brazilian and Ugandan cultures and class systems, and learning to be flexible and resourceful in dealing with health-care delivery systems. And for some students who may not have considered a medical career serving a rural community, the MIRT project may have sparked their interest.

For more information about the MIRT project, please visit www.cbu.edu/~aross/biodept/MIRT-CBU.html.

Volunteering for Peace

CBU professor passes along a lesson to write home about

BY CHRISTOPHER MCCORMACK ('03)

DR. STAN EISEN, PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY AND director of the pre-professional health programs at CBU, visited Israel this summer, July 22-August 8, as a participant with the Volunteers for Israel Program (VFI). VFI is a non-political, non-profit organization providing friends of Israel an opportunity to provide direct, hands-on support.

Dr. Eisen worked at Tel Ha-Shomer, a military base that provides disaster relief for the entire country. "The Israeli military provides for the country's medical and disaster relief, much like the Red Cross does in the United States," Eisen explains. "Our group was responsible for cutting open medical supply kits, checking the expiration dates, and repacking them. The kits were then distributed to all of the hospitals and army medical facilities in the country." They are also shipped internationally to disaster relief sites, such as the Kyoto earthquake in 1999, he adds.

Eisen says his team was reassured of the value and importance of their work when tragedy struck. A fluent Hebrew



speaker from his group got everyone's attention when he heard a bulletin on the radio. A bomb had been detonated in an area of Hebrew University where hundreds of students were taking placement exams. "Without even realizing it, we began working faster, with a greater sense of urgency," he recalls.

Eisen's trip not only provided him with a chance to participate in helping Israel, but he says it also changed him in many ways.

"Signs on all of the bathroom doors in Israel say, 'Please conserve water, Israel does not have much.' Another sign warns against leaving the water on while shaving or brushing your teeth. Every home has a water tank on the roof that is heated by solar panels, therefore limiting the amount of water

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available for bathing needs.”

He explains that because of the limited water supply everyone must take “navy showers”—where the water is turned on only long enough to get you wet, then is turned back off while you lather with soap. Next, the water is turned back on to wash the soap off and wet the hair, and then turned back off again. You then lather your hair, and turn the water back on only to rinse and finish. “I still take ‘navy showers’ today,” Eisen says. “I’ve never conserved water before, but now it has become a habit.”

Not only did Eisen’s trip to Israel change his outlook on consumption and conservation, but it also moved him spiritually. For years, he has donated money to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to plant trees. However, during his trip he was able to personally go to a JNF forest and actually plant trees himself. “To be able to personally plant a tree, rather than handing over money to have a tree planted, was a spiritual event,” he says.

One early morning at his hotel, a friend called Eisen over to the balcony overlooking the Judean Hills. It was five minutes before 6:00 a.m., and they could barely see the reddish-yellow light ascending over the top of the hills, when suddenly the sun appeared, illuminating the entire valley. “It was such a rush and such an awe-inspiring scene, that I was intensely moved,” he says.

“Jacob and his sons took care of the flocks on those hills,” he says. “Now I know why people move there. The image of the sun rising over the Judean Hills at Ma’aleh Adumim became a spiritual moment that set the mood for the rest of my trip.”

Dr. Eisen is known in class lectures to preface the crux of a lesson with the phrase, “Here is the lesson to write home about.”

When asked what lessons he could write home about from his trip, he provides an anecdote about an Israeli pediatric doctor who does not turn anyone away. “In the U.S. anybody without insurance or the ability to pay would be sent away. But this doctor treats anybody who comes into the hospital, even Palestinians who are behind on medical payment, and despite the fact that the two countries are at war.

“The lesson to write home about is to seek peace.”

Eisen paraphrases a story from the book of Genesis in which Abraham’s sons, Ishmael and Isaac, have come to bury their father. Somehow these two brothers who are engaged in conflict can solve their differences and come together for their father—Eisen’s emphasis from the passage is on the word together.

“This word signifies that the brothers were able to put aside their conflict for the common goal of peace,” he explains. “Why can’t the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac do the same thing 3,000 years later?” ■

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was being examined, but she seemed frightened and would not even stand on the scale. Her grandmother put her down for a moment and she came to me with her arms stretched out and



The Haiti Medical Mission may have been no walk on the beach, but Scott Adelman still managed to catch a few rays.

gave me a hug. I’ll never forget that moment.”

Like Nina and Edin and Scott, Andrew Asbury grabbed a special memory, too.

“I’ll always remember a little girl that one of the doctors and I were seeing,” Asbury relates. “She was diagnosed with bronchitis, common in children in Haiti, and she wore the most beautiful red dress with flowers and lace. She was obviously scared of us, and probably was wondering what we were going to do. All of the students at CBU had brought candy and toys for the children. When I handed her a sucker and some stickers, the fear left her face. She left soon after we gave her mother the antibiotics, and I remember her smile as she left the clinic.”

The CBU students agree that they would all go back for similar opportunities in Haiti or other countries. Down the road in their careers, each one wants to be able to help heal and give a little back to those in need. Scott Adelman echoes the sentiments of his colleagues: “Absolutely, without hesitation. The rewards far outweigh the sacrifices. I am looking forward to another trip, hopefully within the next year or so. If I do become a physician, I would certainly like to be a part of a team like this again and offer some real help to people who need it.”

The people. As the CBU students witnessed, the Haitians are a proud, humble, welcoming people. They were grateful, too. Maybe as grateful as the CBU missionaries were for having added this adventure to their journey as learners and leaders. ■