

Dr. Coletta Returns to Haiti

On Saturday, Apr 17, 2010, Devon Prep Class of 1971 Alumnus Dr. Anthony Coletta, Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of the Holy Redeemer Health System, led 18 medical professionals into Haiti to live and work at the Adventist Hospital in Carrefour for a week.

This was his second trip into the country after it was hit by a devastating earthquake in January. As he did the first time, Dr. Coletta wrote several letters about his experiences while he served in Haiti. His most recent letters are below.

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Sunday, April 18, 2010

Hello to all!

We arrived safely here to the Adventist Hospital in Carrefour in the early evening yesterday. This hospital is far closer to the epicenter of the earthquake than the Community Hospital of Haiti where I last worked. So the ride here was riddled with destruction beyond anything that could be conveyed in the evening news.

The management infrastructure of this hospital is far better than what I last experienced. On the other hand, the disarray remains. The confusion. the disorganization. None of that has changed. And today is Sunday. So I can only imagine what tomorrow will bring.

Our team has jumped in with both feet. Hank and Joe in the ER. Cal with logistics. Nurses, nurse practitioners, family docs. There is more work here than we will ever be able to do, so, as the others, we will do what we can.

Some of the amenities are gone. The two meals a day have been narrowed down to one if there is enough. Some of us are in tents on the roof, others on mats or cots on the floor. But regardless, we are far better off than the Haitian people.

This morning, while on the roof watching the sun rise, a young 23 year old Haitian (can't recall his name) joined me and told me the story of where he and his family were the day the earth shook. Miraculously, they are all alive. He has volunteered here at the hospital since that day. He also grows food in his small garden. And that food has served to feed his brothers and sisters as well as others in the neighborhood. He tells me, the Haitian ground is so fertile that whatever you plant will grow, Just give it water. He dreams of the day when he will be a successful farmer, living off the land and giving back to his

country and his people.

You have to be here to believe it.

Tony

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Tuesday, April 20, 2010

Good morning to all! It is 6:30 am here in Carrefour. We make general surgery rounds at 7 am and the entire staff meets on the steps in front of the hospital at 7:30 am to discuss issues and prepare for the day.

So time is short and it is difficult to put together all of the experiences and put them to "pen and paper". But I thought I would take a moment to reflect on some of what has changed since three days after the earthquake.

The tents are far better. What were shanty towns for the homeless, created from sticks and tarps, are now tent cities with real tents that have structure and likely will provide some protection from the wind and rain. An incredible contrast to my last visit.

The injuries are different. Orthopedics is mostly now reconstructive and rehabilitative. Infections are common but not rampant. Much of the general surgery is acute (we did an appendectomy on our first day), and some chronic conditions such as painful hernias, etc. There are a collection of infected abdominal wounds. That sort of thing.

There is less death. That is not to say that babies and/or adults are not dying because we don't have the basics that are needed to keep them alive. But there is less death.

The Europeans are gone. At least at this hospital. The disaster experts and the search and rescue teams have been replaced by voluntary American health professionals. Slowly there is a transition taking place as more Haitian doctors and nurses return. And here at the Adventis hospital, efforts are being made to facilitate that vital transition.

And I learned about this place called Loma Linda University in California where the medical school trains medical missionaries. So throughout the hospital are staff and medical students who are amongst the most remarkable I have ever met. Alex is a fourth year medical student who is on rotation here. He has been accepted into a surgical residency at Loma Linda, and he is training to become a missionary surgeon. We may be at the epicenter of the earthquake, but Alex is

the epicenter of this hospital. He is the go to guy. And he has been assisting me in the operating room. Besides his exceptional maturity, his logistical expertise, his clinical knowledge and his calm, cool demeanor, Alex can operate better than most third year surgical residents I have ever met in the States. The missionary world has gained a young prodigy.

With all that, there are still far more supplies than there are nurses. Boxes and boxes of supplies that remain unopened and will likely take months to sort through. But these are durable goods and will be put to good use some day.

Finally, there is one thing that has not changed. The Haitian spirit. The Haitian faith. Their will to survive and to nurture their families. Or what is left of them. Actually, I may not be right about that. There may have been a change. In the direction of strength.

From the "Green Team" (in honor of our lime colored tee shirts) here at the Adventis Hospital in Carrefour, thanks to you all for your love and support.

Tony

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Thursday, April 22, 2010

We are approaching the end of our week here. There are many stories to tell of life and death, of survival and hope. Stories that cover the spectrum from the routine to the completely unexpected. From appendectomies to a life saving laparotomy for a 4 year old boy. And for Anne, the 52 year old American missionary who dropped a bottle at a site about 10 minutes from our third world hospital and arrived in a jeep with a potentially lacerated brachial artery in her arm. There was a tight dressing in place and her arm was blue and without pulses. Ann found herself surrounded with a team of US surgeons, anesthesiologists, ER docs and nurses. And amidst the OR room with no lights (except for regular room light), and whatever suture and instruments we could scavenge, we were lucky to find that she had missed the artery by millimeters, the bleeding was from veins which we controlled. And within a couple of hours, she was on her way back to her base camp. I saw her the next day and everything was fine. They are a team of missionaries helping to treat post traumatic stress disorder here. She's more qualified than ever!

And downstairs, Chery Bonel, a 63 year old man with a very painful hernia waits patiently for surgery in a room that must be 103 degrees. I had seen him 3 days ago and we tried to set him up for today just so we could get him done and relieve his pain. His injury is not related to the earthquake, but his suffering is. I

thought we would have to send him home today because we just did not have the time and the staff. But he is surrounded by his family and his son, his daughter, his wife pleaded that we take care of him. So the way you handle that here is you find a cot, and you find a space, then you get an interpreter and you get permission to put him in the cot in that space. And you tell them to hold onto their papers and you keep a watch on him. You ask the Haitian nurses to start his IV. And now he's under my care and we will get him done, one way or the other before we leave. That's what it always comes down to. One patient at a time.

There are times that the misery is overwhelming and it seems that this country has once again been abandoned. And the thought that we will be leaving Saturday is, as Alex, our senior medical student extraordinaire, says, bittersweet. But we all have to just keep in mind that we are planting one seed at a time, and changing the face of the mountain.

Internet access here is undependable, so I'm not sure I will have the chance to tell any more stories this time around. From all of us, to all of you, thanks so much for you undying support.

Tony