

On Tuesday, January 12, 2010, Dr. Brian Donahue (IBJI Arlington Heights) watched the news reports of the 7.0 earthquake that devastated much of Haiti. Less than two weeks later, he boarded a plane bound for Haiti by the Dominican Republic. Like many other volunteers, he went for the simple reason that he knew he could help. For 10 days that is what he did. Below is an interview conducted with Dr. Donahue about his experience.

What caused you to go to Haiti?

After watching the news the first two days, seeing all of the people with orthopaedic injuries really made my heart wrench. I contacted about 6 organizations, but all said they had plenty of docs. Then on January 21st, my neighbor called to tell me that he had a friend from VOHMHaiti (Vision of Hope Ministries Haiti) who was looking for orthopaedic surgeons and anesthesiologists to come to Haiti. I discussed it with my wife, who supported my going. I left the next Sunday, January 24th.

What was your chief concern as you came into Haiti?

Just the uncertainty of the situation in general.

What is your involvement with VOHMHaiti?

Until this trip, I really didn't know of them. My neighbor, who is a general surgeon, is affiliated with them. Their website is www.VOHMHaiti.com. They have a mission in Milot (east of Cap Haitian), where they already assist orphans and sponsor a school. In Milot, there is a hospital (Sacred Heart Hospital) with which VOHMHaiti already has a relationship. They were trying to get doctors to that hospital to help, and that's where I went. VOHMHaiti helped me in several ways: getting me there, finding me a place to stay in Haiti, and providing meals. The VOHMHaiti president's son is Haitian and lives in Chicago. He just finished a Masters in social work from Loyola University. Fredo wanted to come to Haiti after the earthquake and so he accompanied me. Not only did he translate for me, but he also educated me about Haiti's history.

Who else did you meet there?

At Sacred Heart Hospital, there were all Americans helping, mostly through Crudem. Crudem is an organization that is affiliated with that hospital and their website is www.cruden.com. Most of the volunteers stayed for a week. Some other physicians and nurses and a social worker came through VOHMHaiti. And because all the Haitian schools were closed, the local students helped as translators and transporters.

What was the reaction of the Haitian people to the help they received from you and others?

The Haitian people were very happy to have us there helping. Despite the intense suffering, they always had a smile and thanks, despite losing family members and limbs.

What exactly did you do there?

I would typically visit patients in the morning and then go to the operating room for cases. We had three operating rooms and three procedure rooms where we gave fairly heavy sedation to injured patients and cleaned wounds, did small amputations and minor procedures such as external fixators. More major surgery was performed in the Ors. The medical care was very good for Haiti, but would not have been considered good by U.S. standards. We dealt with flies in the OR, for example. And every case had to be planned out in advance to ensure that you had the necessary equipment. It took about 4 hours to sterilize equipment – in the U.S. it takes about one hour for that.



Dr. Donahue with Patient in Haiti. She's wearing his Bears cap!



Haitian Girl with Amputated Leg

What do they really need there now?

Unfortunately, the medical care is going to be ongoing for a long time. Many of the people have wounds that were being followed and cleansed every 3 days or so. Rehabilitative therapy and prosthetics will be a serious need as there were many amputations.

What were your feelings/thoughts as you were leaving?

I wished that I could stay longer to help more; yet, I was very tired.

How did going to Haiti impact you personally?

It was a very sad experience to see such suffering, yet it was personally very rewarding to be able to help. What I did was truly a "drop in the bucket", but every little bit makes a difference.

