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Figure 1

A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN HAITI

A magnitude 7.2 earthquake that struck southern Haiti on Aug. 14, 2021 damaged and destroyed many communities.¹ In recent months, chaos has ensued with uncontrolled gang violence and kidnappings. In addition, the global pandemic has greatly impacted the community. Unfortunately, the Haitian government continues to struggle in providing public services like physical therapy education and yet a glimmer of hope ensues with the community due to students and alumni of the *Institut Supérieur des Sciences Infirmières et de Physiothérapie*.

One PT student, Stanley Lambert agreed to share his story on a Tuesday morning over a zoom session; as the pandemic prevented a face-to-face encounter. See figure 1 for a picture of Stanley with another PT student. This interview took place during a time of great turmoil in Haiti, as well as disruptions throughout the world. Even though Stanley spoke from the comfort of his home, violent acts were a daily occurrence outside his door.

Educational Background

The first question intended to give a background to his training & current work in Haiti. Stanley reported, “At the age of three months, I was adopted by an American. John Brown Isaac; it was through my American adoptive parent that I received a good foundation, even learning both Spanish & English languages. After my adoptive father died, I went back to Haiti and was reunited with my mother.”

He reported that he grew up in Haiti, completing his educational academy work. As a young adult, he went to the USA at the University of Central Missouri to obtain some training concerning the care of patients, such as the examination of patients; review of history; diagnosis; administration of treatment; counseling; and general well-being. He returned to Haiti in 2015 to finish his medical training.”

Stanley started his physical therapy (PT) education in 2016 at the *Institut Supérieur des Sciences Infirmières et de Physiothérapie*. The school’s educational mission is “to train quality professionals as nurses and physical therapists who are capable of meeting the objectives of the



national health system and advance their respective professions while improving the health care services provided in Haiti.”² He chose this direction for his career because of the earthquake that occurred in 2010, explaining, “I saw too many people with lots of fractures and amputations. They were in so much pain and there was not much assistance for the pain.” He acknowledged that it has been his passion to help his Haitian people and this most recent earthquake has furthered his resolve to help his community. See figure 2 for a picture of the earthquake of 2021.



Figure 2

Passion for Physical Therapy

Next, I asked him to further explain his passion for PT. He acknowledged, “I do have an interest in human anatomy/physiology and my country has a definite need for physical therapy. He further specified, “but more importantly, I always wanted to work in a much-needed field because I believe that the Lord has chosen me for a special purpose. I believe that PT is a platform that can be used to glorify the Lord. It’s through making an impact in someone’s life; it brings great joy and satisfaction.”

“For example, as the patient undergoes rehabilitation and recovery process, I get to witness a great level of perseverance and will power, demonstrated by individuals in their everyday life. There is joy and a personal reward of knowing that I played a part in helping restore a patient’s quality of life. In Haiti, too many people are suffering from pain, like low back pain (LBP), tendonitis, arthritis etc. We have plenty of medical doctors, but not enough doctors of PT. Originally people from the area had to go to another country such as Dominican Republic to get help from a PT. I saw there was a definite need for PT to assist with alleviating the pain and improving quality of life for my country’s people.”

Differences in Health Care

Because Stanley had some training over in the US, I wondered how it was different working as a caregiver in Haiti. He started by discussing, “Haiti is not a country that is well developed compared to the US. Everybody knows that...in US there are more things that are in place for doctors and other health care professionals”, this enables health care professionals to provide the care that they need for their patients. He further explained that the Haitian professional, “has more time on their hands as a doctor because... a lot of patients would like to come to the hospital, but because they have no assistance to go the hospital, so they stay home. He stated that, “not even 7% of the Haitian population has insurance to pay for medical/health care. A licensed doctor or other health care professional, employed by a state health care institution, only makes around 45,000 Haitian dollars.” In comparison the median wage for a US physician is equal to or greater than \$208,000 per year.³

Stanley further stated that the actual care of patients is not much different except for the severity of diagnoses and lack of resources.



Some of the common diagnoses that are treated in Haiti are, “high blood pressure, diabetes mellites, low back pain, cystitis/urinary tract Infection, infectious gastritis, dermatitis etc.” He explained that, “the water we are using is not well treated; it’s not purified. Besides impure water, improper nutrition may play a role, such as high salt intake, could contribute to health problems.”

Another area of concern for the Haitian population is traumatic accidents, such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), spinal cord injury (SCI), and various fractures. Many of the community hospitals can not deal with these injuries and have to refer them to larger facilities. World Atlas published that Haitian life expectancy is very low compared to the rest of the western world (i.e., male life expectancy= 61.5 years; female= 65.5 years) due to poor health facilities and infrastructure.⁴ A systemic analysis of the causes of the shortened life expectancy found that infectious diseases continue to be an issue, however, other public health issues such as road injuries contribute to lower life expectancy.⁵

Growth of Physical Therapy in Haiti

Both infectious disease due to poor water and nutrition, and trauma caused by vehicular accidents could be dealt with through public policies of improvement. Furthermore, the importance of good nutrition and exercise for health and wellness could be addressed through proper education. Physical Therapy could play a major role with this education. Because of the importance of health and wellness, my next question was - what it means to the Haitian community to have the growth in physical therapists. Stanley, relayed, “Unfortunately, there are not many physical therapy clinics in Haiti. Haiti only started the physical therapy program? after the earthquake in 2010 as many people ended up with disabilities, such as amputations,

fractures, TBI, SCI etc.” He further specified, “I know of only four PT clinics in Haiti. Physical therapy is so important for the community because you can really help others by only using your fingers and hands.” The limited supplies and equipment will not stop the education and care that can be given by a physical therapist.

Stanley described, “It is like a dream come true, I would say... the hospital in Pierre Payen is receiving patients from all over the country. Some need to be referred to PT, which was very difficult before the PT clinic existed. Patients had to travel far for the PT service, sometimes out of the country. Now the people don’t have to worry because of the existence of the clinic. Certainly, the hospital can take care of surgeries and sometimes provide medicine. But that does not mean their pain is alleviated or they are able to go back to school or work. It is through PT that the patients get a chance to live a better quality of life.

Inside View of Two PT Clinics

Stanley gave an inside view of two PT clinics, one located in Pierre Payen and the other in Port-au-Prince. The Pierre Payen clinic has three physical therapists (PTs); two are also alumni of Institut Supérieur des Sciences Infirmières et de Physiothérapie. Before the turmoil, they would each see about 15 patients per day at Pierre Payen.

Stanley spends most of his time at the Port-au-Prince clinic where he has his home and can’t travel due to the country’s violence. At this clinic, there were three PTs, but unfortunately two went back to US due to the violence. Stanley provides care to about 11 to 20 patients/day. The patients are of all ages, across the lifespan and have a variety of diagnoses - such as arthritis, tendonitis, LBP, shoulder pain, torticollis, amputations, athletic injuries, and



TBI, SCI. His clinic has one mat table, a treadmill, gym ball, medicine ball, foam rolls, dumbbells, theraband, ultrasound machine, and hot packs. The clinic needs more current equipment, such as functional electric stimulation (FES) machines. Stanley even purchased his own FES unit to use with his patients. The clinic also needs a Nordic track elliptical, some exercise bikes, isokinetic equipment, as well as more treatment tables. He commented, “It would be especially nice to have more tables, so that I could work with more patients at the same time.” See figures 3 & 4 for pictures of the Lambert PT Clinic.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Specific Clinical Examples

I wanted to get a better understanding of how

he takes care for his patients by giving me some examples. His first example was a 19 year old, who had to stop going to school for 3 months because of low back pain. Stanley, described, “She had pain radiating from L3/4 region and it affected her ability to function independently. She had tried many different doctors at different hospitals, but did not receive any relief for her condition. The past doctors would only give her a shot for temporary pain relief. Finally, one doctor recommended to her to travel to Cuba or the Dominican Republic to see a PT. She discovered my clinic in Port-au-Prince and I was able to treat her for 2 months with spinal mobilization, instructions for her posture in all positions and appropriate trunk/hip strengthening/ flexibility exercises. I’m happy to say she’s back to school and is no longer in any pain; she thought it was miraculous. And in fact, most of my patients think that what I do for them is miraculous.”

His next example was of a patient with high blood pressure that led to a cerebrovascular attack, resulting in hemiplegia. Stanley reported, “I saw her 3 times per week for months and was able to assist her to walk again. She had spasticity and I showed her how to reduce it, such as weight bearing activities and rolling the limb. Then we worked on strengthening the muscles. Temporarily we used an ankle foot orthosis to assist with walking. Today she walks without any assistive device. My patient is so joyful of her recovery, but wishes that others could have the opportunity to work with a PT as she had.”

Finally, he talked about two children who had cerebral palsy; both having difficulties with their activities of daily living and ability to walk. He reported, “I worked on increasing their muscle tone and strengthening the weakened muscles. To encourage them, I would buy candy to use as a reward for completing their exercises and activities. I had to work



closely with my US instructors to determine the best plan of care for both of them. And today, after months of care, they are both walking. It's because of instances like these, I am so proud of physical therapy. It is a joy to see the progressive changes in my patients and I know it's because of the physical therapy."

Other Barriers to PT

I next asked Stanley how the country's violence has affected his important work with his patients. He stated, "With the instability in Haiti, one has to take precautions while going to work. Normally, I work at the hospital from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, but it gets dark at six and so I cannot work that late that impacts number of patients that I see each day. Also, I can't work on the weekends because the turmoil is greater on those days. Before I leave for work, I check the news to determine if there is a riot in progress and its location. If the violence is close to the hospital or clinic, then I won't go to work that day."

I also wondered whether the pandemic affected his work. He reported, "There are problems with the COVID-19 pandemic, but not as bad as the civil unrest. To be honest, I think it's a miracle in that the pandemic has not affected the Haitians as bad as the people of US, Italy, and other developed countries. I really don't understand how a country that has many resources to utilize with stopping the spread of the virus, has many more affected people in comparison to Haiti. What's interesting is that many Haitians have not used a mask, nor avoided going places because they don't believe the virus is real. However, most do live outdoors in huts and if they gather like at the market, it is outdoors. Most work outdoors in the farms, whereby exposure to the air and sun could be a deterrent to the virus. Certainly, if they come to the hospital, they all must wear a mask; it is mandatory. Honestly, I

am surprised that we were not more affected by the pandemic."

Concluding Remarks

Stanley concluded our session, by stating, "I have learned that as a physical therapist, the best instrument that I have is my hands. The resources in Haiti are so limited. If I go to another town and find a person in need, I'll only need my hands to do good work. My hands are invaluable; they do most of the work with helping my patients, whether it's to alleviate pain or promote function. And I know that my patients are so appreciative of this miraculous work!" Yes, hope for the people of Haiti grows with every miracle worker like the student physical therapist, Stanley Lambert.

For more information about the Churches of God and missionary work, feel free to check out <https://www.collegefirst.org/mission-and-vision>.

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