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Field Update

Like Quake Victims, Hope for Haiti's Response Goes Beyond Port au Prince

As day 15 draws to a close, the city of Les Cayes exhales a deep breath. It has been a rocky two weeks, but the city and her people are in far better shape, due to the tireless efforts of Haitians banding together for a common cause, and NGOs such as Hope for Haiti moving quickly to respond to this devastating tragedy. The ripples from Port au Prince have been felt here acutely: every day the UN estimates another 2,000 people pass through its illuminated cement arches. Roughly half of those 2,000 stay here in Les Cayes, filling the increasingly crowded and slightly more desperate streets. Gas is being sold out of water bottles for \$10 a gallon. A bag of rice costs twice what it did two weeks ago. We see the earthquake's aftermath most vividly at the hospitals and clinics in Les Cayes: patients wait on the floor, thrusting an x-ray at passersby in hopes of getting treated sooner, and yet it often takes ten days or longer to finally get into the operating room.

Thankfully, Hope for Haiti knew that the earthquake's physical damage was only part of the problem, and that the entire country of Haiti would need help. We watched as Haitians from all over the country helped out, in whatever way they could, and followed their example. Country Director Mike Stewart made the trip north to Port au Prince to coordinate relief efforts there, while the rest of the Hope for Haiti staff remained in Les Cayes, preparing for the inevitable wave of displaced persons needing medical attention, food, water, and shelter.

On Sunday, after having local Naples doctor David Perlmutter assess needs at the local hospitals, three specialists traveled through perilous weather, gas shortages, and small, unknown Caribbean islands to finally reach Les Cayes. Now here, they're operating on ten to fifteen patients a day: cleaning wounds, resetting bones, doing skin grafts on unbearably deep gashes, reconstructing hands, and operating on fractured femurs. Patrick Eucalitto, the Program Director for Hope for Haiti, has been tireless in his efforts to coordinate our medical team so that their skills are put to best use, while Lee Cohen, Hope for Haiti's Education Specialist, has shifted his focus to logistics, developing a text-messaging communication system for the medical and humanitarian workers in Les Cayes.





Our efforts are slowly paying dividends: hospitals here are talking to one another about their needs and resources, and patients are getting medical attention more efficiently and with greater care. While resources are still scarce, a feeling of common purpose amongst doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, from countries all over the world, is allowing us to pool our knowledge and staff to help as many Haitians as possible.

Walking the hallways of Brenda, a former Ear, Nose, & Throat clinic transformed into an overflow ward of the general hospital, it's impossible to not be moved by the stories of the brave men and women who traveled from Port au Prince to get here. Paying five times the usual bus fare, enduring hot, cramped seating, often with broken bones and children on top of them, people from Port au Prince nonetheless came. They came because they knew they couldn't stay. Their homes are gone. There are no jobs. Some former inhabitants of Port au Prince go back to family in and around cities like Les Cayes; others go

wherever the limited choices and dire reality they're facing might take them. Either way, for the first time in two weeks the former residents of Port au Prince open their eyes not to death, but to hope.

Christin Lounes had lived in Port au Prince for eight years before the earthquake as a mechanic. Since he was a child watching the cars drive by in his hometown of Miragoâne, he tells me, he's wanted to be a great person and a great mechanic. His face is strained as he tells me this.

Because he knows, just as I do, that after having his right leg amputated above the knee, the odds of him returning to his passion are slim. He tells me to thank Americans, and for God to bless them. He also tells me to encourage Americans to help Haiti, so that if something as horrific as this ever happens again, Haitians will be able to take care of themselves. Watching Christin sit in his bed patiently, bandaged but certainly not broken, I can't think of a better hope for Haiti's future.



- Lee Cohen, *Hope for Haiti's Education Specialist*

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