

heartbeat

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University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies

CELEBRATING
70 YEARS —
MOVING
FORWARD

ON A MISSION • • • PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY • • • A YEAR OF SIMULATION • • • Q&A: DEAN MUNRO

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ON A MISSION

Jude Dhaiti's passion for bringing health care to his native island nation has changed many lives, including his own.

As a dazzling sun rises over the mountains of Thomonde, Jude Dhaiti is already at work in the house that serves as headquarters and dormitory for the Haiti medical mission team. He's checking the weather report and road conditions, arranging transportation, and making sure everything's ready for the trip to the distant village the team will visit that day. Located in central Haiti near its border with the Dominican Republic, Thomonde is a rural farming community with high rates of poverty and emigration to the U.S., and extremely limited access to health care.

Twenty-five advanced practice nursing students are milling about, grabbing a quick breakfast, helping pack lunches and medical supplies, and asking Dhaiti countless questions. Through it all, the School of Nursing and Health Studies employee is the knowing calm at the center of a bustling, well-organized operation that will provide primary and preventive health care services to some 400 adults and children over the course of an extraordinary week.

The School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) has been visiting the Thomonde region twice a year since 2010, and Dhaiti has been an integral member of the team for the past six years. "We couldn't do it without him," says team leader Johis Ortega, B.S.N. '02, M.S.N. '06, Ph.D. '10, associate dean for Hemispheric and Global Initiatives and associate professor of clinical. "Everyone feels safe and comfortable because he's there. He makes sure our students and faculty understand the Haitian culture and that we know what to expect."

The School of Nursing and Health Studies runs mobile health care clinics in Haiti twice a year addressing pediatric, adult, and women's health. Last year longtime UM supporter Evelyn J. Budde donated \$5,000 toward the mission. For the second year, Walgreens has provided in-kind donations of health care supplies totaling over \$7,000. To learn more about supporting this special project, please contact the Development Office at (305) 284-9773.

The team gathers for a morning pre-briefing session before heading out into the lush green landscape dotted with palm trees and small, colorful houses. After an hour-long drive along rugged roads, they arrive at a schoolhouse that will be the setting for the one-day clinic. Already a large number of people—elderly men, pregnant women, mothers with babies, children of all ages—have lined up outside the structure. Dhaiti works closely with Project Medishare, a Haiti-based nonprofit health care organization, to coordinate the logistics of the visit to area residents. Some of them are visiting the clinic for the first time; others know it well and call out greetings to Dhaiti, Ortega, and other team members. Many patients have walked an hour or more from remote farms and villages to be seen during today's clinic.



Christopher Mourra Thompson, above and bottom right

The all-volunteer SONHS health care team springs into action, aware that every minute is precious. Working in small clinical groups, four faculty members and their student charges see as many as 150 patients a day. They assess the space and furnishings and divide the area into separate clinics for triage, pediatrics, maternity, and adult care. They developed their rigorous protocol based on the U.S. National Incident Management System (NIMS). Their adapted NIMS framework, which was documented last year in the *International Journal of Travel Medicine and Global Health*, has allowed the SONHS team to address safety issues while speeding up clinical set up times and increasing patient capacity.

“We can set up in 20 minutes instead of taking an hour because we

know exactly what to do,” explains assistant professor of clinical Kenya Snowden, M.S.N. '10, D.N.P. '11. “The hardest part is figuring out how we're going to set up the space because we never know what we're going to find.” But ingenuity and resourcefulness rule the day: For the maternity area, students sometimes have to push benches together and drape them with clean sheets to create a table for pelvic exams, hanging more sheets around it for privacy.

Once again, Dhaiti is at the center of activity, coordinating logistics, assigning the local interpreters to their posts, and providing information and guidance to the residents who are waiting to be seen. His strategic skills and methodical approach are a perfect fit for the NIMS model. Throughout the hectic, demanding day, he'll serve as interpreter while supervising the other interpreters, ensuring they're communicating medical information accurately. He'll troubleshoot and resolve myriad issues that may arise, freeing the medical team to focus on providing care. He'll arrange the team's transportation back to home base. And he'll constantly make his way around the clinic, checking to make sure the team members are taking care of themselves. Have they had lunch? Do they need a break? Some water? He knows it's easy to neglect your own needs when there's so much to be done.

Officially Dhaiti's position, identified near the top of the NIMS org chart, is “Student Services/Community Ambassador,” but his contributions are more complex and nuanced.

“He lets everyone know, if you need anything, just go to him and he'll figure it out,” says assistant professor of clinical Juan M. González, D.N.P. “It's always very reassuring when you're there and he's part of the team.”

“Jude takes care of everyone, and of so many things behind the scenes that we might not even notice,” agrees Snowden. “He has a way of calming people down, of resolving situations.”

Snowden recalls the time a mother brought her newborn to the clinic with a fever, rash, and distended belly. She knew

the infant's only chance at survival depended on an emergency trip to a hospital. She immediately turned to Dhaiti. “I said, ‘Jude, you've got to make sure this baby gets to the hospital because otherwise the baby might not make it,’ and he responded in his reassuring way,” she recounts. “It's very hard to arrange transportation to the hospital. We don't often do it. But Jude took charge. He communicated the urgency of the situation and did whatever he had to do to try to get the mother and baby taken to the hospital. And that's just one example of the many heroic things Jude does every day of the mission.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT HOME

At the SONHS, Dhaiti is a data analyst. He corrals numbers and facts into tidy reports for the entire school. But what this beloved—and tirelessly efficient—SONHS employee gives back to his island nation through the medical missions cannot be contained, predicted, or explained by the rows and columns of any spreadsheet.

Born and raised in Port-au-Prince, Dhaiti was originally recruited to the initiative by Ortega and the late Marie Chery, a SONHS faculty member and country director for Project Medishare in Haiti who passed away in 2014.

“Marie Chery always hoped I'd join the team and experience the work they do for the community,” Dhaiti remembers. “She made sure I went there that first time, when I joined the mission to Thomonde in 2013 as a photographer.” From his first trip, Dhaiti's role has quickly evolved into one that is vital to the mission. But the missions have also been a revelation for Dhaiti.



“Going to Thomonde made me see a part of Haiti I didn't know,” he says. “I was fortunate to be part of the middle class in Haiti, so learning that people in Thomonde didn't have any health care, and seeing what the SONHS and Project Medishare are doing, really changed my life.”

A FAMILY LEGACY OF GIVING

Jude Dhaiti's father, a dentist, served as dean of Haiti's dental school. His mother also worked at the school, and emphasized the importance of education to her children. Dhaiti moved to New York at 17, began college at the New York Institute of Technology and worked in banking. He eventually married and had a son before returning to Haiti for several years. There he owned and operated a number of businesses. “I moved back to Haiti because I wanted to give my child the same type of family setting I had when I was young,” he says.

By 2001 Dhaiti had a daughter as well and had relocated to Miami, where he soon began working for the U. At UM, he continued the education he'd curtailed to work full-time in New York. Taking one class at a time while bringing his considerable business background to the task of troubleshooting data challenges at the SONHS, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science from the College of Arts and Sciences.

He had been living outside of Haiti for almost a decade when the catastrophic earthquake of 2010 occurred. Dhaiti says he lost many friends in the disaster—one was killed by falling debris as she fled a supermarket, another was trapped under rubble in a bank, and yet another friend died after flying back home to Haiti from Miami that same day. Dhaiti's father, in his 70s at the time, had to flee to safety from Port-au-Prince to the Dominican Republic on the back of a motorcycle. Even as the Haitian people worked to recover from the terrible devastation of the temblor, they were slammed by



hurricanes—most recently Matthew in 2016 and Irma in 2017—with the countryside especially hard hit.

Their country's challenges led Dhaiti's family to start a nonprofit organization. “We started it by feeding the poor,” says Dhaiti. The organization also began fundraising educational scholarships for young people. “At first we were able to sponsor six kids, and now that number is up to 210,” says Dhaiti.

RETURN TO HAITI

Some of the students who take part in the medical missions are also from Haiti. One of them is Christopher Mourra Thompson, M.S.N. '18, who participated in the past two missions while pursuing his graduate nursing degree at the SONHS. Born in the U.S. to Haitian parents, Thompson, like Dhaiti, lived in Port-au-Prince until the age of 17. “I had a more privileged upbringing than the majority of the people in Haiti, and growing up I was always very aware of that,” says Thompson. Still, he too was shocked to see Thomonde's lack of health care firsthand. “I asked myself, how can I help make this better next time? What can I do with the resources I have available in Haiti? Why are we buying food in the U.S. and bringing it to Haiti in suitcases?”

Thompson not only contributed his clinical skills in December 2017 and this past March, he also enlisted the attention and aid of his family, who runs wholesale companies in Haiti. Their contributions and connections ultimately saved the program more than \$5,000. Any money saved enables the team to purchase more medicine, a scarce resource in rural Haiti.

“It was such an amazing experience to give back to my community,” says Thompson. “I think that's what motivated



so many of us to go back. It was the community feel, and the great need of the population.”

“It's important for Haitians to contribute to the project,” says Dhaiti. “What happened to Chris also happened to me, in terms of Haitians returning and not really understanding the country until you experience the mission. All the Haitian students who've gone on the mission say the same thing.”

Many other students describe their experience with the SONHS clinics in Haiti as transformational as well. “I have never experienced anything like this in my entire nursing career,” says D.N.P. student Marcia Bell, who has worked with U.S. veterans, the homeless, and other vulnerable populations over her 20-year nursing career. “The SONHS clinic in Haiti was such an eye-opener. I cried every day. I pledged to myself as a health care provider to go back to Haiti with this mission.”

And when she, Thompson, and future SONHS students do make that trip, they will find Jude Dhaiti is still a constant energetic and emotional force at the center of the undertaking. “Jude has facilitated our ability to implement this mission year after year,” says Ortega. “His devotion and dedication come from his own passion for helping Haiti.”

“Jude has a love for his country that he shares with everyone,” adds Snowden.

And even though the twice-yearly visits to Thomonde are grueling and exhausting, taking Dhaiti away from his family during his brief holidays from work, he says he'll keep going back for as long as he can. “I feel I make a difference for Haiti and for the students,” he says. “When each mission ends, and I see how many people we've helped and how the students have been impacted by the work they've done, it's all worth it.”