Expanding medical and nursing educational experiences in Haiti: A partnership in learning

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Program/Project Purpose: The University of Dr. Aristide Foundation (UNIFA) runs a medical and a nursing school in Haiti. Both schools recruit students from impoverished families residing in the countryside. They are committed to returning to work in underserved communities throughout Haiti. Physicians for Haiti (P4H) is a Boston-based non-governmental organization, founded in 2010 with a vision of a self-sustaining Haitian medical education system. Because of the physician and nurse shortage in Haiti, there is a lack of teachers for medical and nursing training. P4H and UNIFA created a partnership called the Visiting Professor (VP) Program with the aim of providing enhanced educational experiences for medical and nursing students at UNIFA.

Structure/Method/Design: The VP Program created a database, now with over 80 medical professionals from which UNIFA requests specific content training. P4H coordinates professional matches to teach seminars. The VP Program facilitates scheduling, translates relevant documents and oversees academic planning. UNIFA provides housing, meals and transportation to the campus for the Visiting Professors. Sustainability is emphasized through the financial contributions of all stakeholders: UNIFA, P4H and the Visiting Professors. Students complete evaluations of their medical knowledge before and after training. For each VP a 360 degree evaluation is completed by the students, the VP and leadership of UNIFA and P4H.

Outcomes & Evaluation: The Visiting Professor Program has facilitated seven seminars for 1347 participants at UNIFA. Seminar themes have included qualitative research methodology, social determinants of health, basic life support and first aid, HIV, tuberculosis, health and behavior and approach to the patient with psychological and medical trauma. Teaching techniques have included lecture, small group, discussion, presentations and project-based education. Pre- and post-testing has demonstrated increases in knowledge over the short term with an average 34% increase in scores after seminar completion. Learner evaluations have shown that over 95% of students felt the topics were important to practice medicine in Haiti and will improve their ability to do patient care. For P4H, challenges include the availability of Visiting Professors fluent in French or Haitian Creole and those with experiences relevant to a low-resource setting. For UNIFA challenges have included availability of in-person translators fluent in medical French and preparing the professors for the large, lecture based teaching environment and low resource setting.

Going Forward: The partnership between P4H and UNIFA has led to medical and nursing students in Haiti having access to content experts not readily available in Haiti. This relationship has the potential to create a cadre of future health professionals who experience an education/learning environment similar to that of a US medical school. P4H focuses on teaching skills and not content. For UNIFA, students enrolled in the traditional curriculum and those participating in the Visiting Professor Program together are better equipped to address the environmental, animal and human health needs of this underserved community. This partnership has two goals; the first is to use education and capacity building to address the community’s interrelated animal and human health needs. The second goal is to provide students with training and firsthand experience working as part of a multidisciplinary team to address global health issues.

From Dartmouth to Haiti: Videoconferencing to facilitate educational cooperation among medical residents in two distinct settings

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Program/Project Purpose: After the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti left unimaginable devastation, a widespread global response