



HBS Newsletter

Hôpital Bon Samaritain

Limbé, Haiti



Through a Looking Glass - Medicine in Haiti

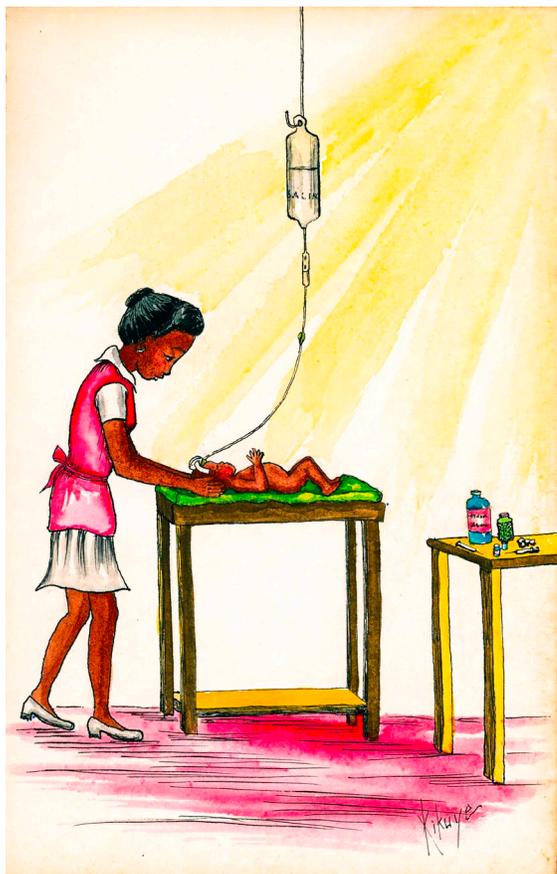
Many factors play a role in the medical history of a country. The country itself, the geography and climate, the inhabitants and their way of living, their culture, their susceptibilities, and immunities to different diseases. The prosperity and wellbeing of the people, and of course opportunities for education and development in the arts and sciences play important roles.

Past Haitian medicine falls into three principal periods: The French Colonial Period (17th and 18th Century), The independent Period (1804-1915) and the Period of American Occupation (since 1915).

During the Colonial period circa 1700, military hospitals were constructed in Cape Haitien, Port au Prince and Les Cayes. Church Hospitals run by French nuns also came into existence. Doctors were practicing in the major towns and speculating upon the many new and bizarre diseases encountered. Surgery was practiced little, not because of incompetency but because of the great frequency of postoperative infections. On the poorer plantations and those farther removed from the larger towns the patients were mostly treated by herb concoctions which continued into present times.

Smallpox and yellow fever (mosquito vectors) were the only diseases that appeared in great epidemic waves. Smallpox pandemics were recorded in 1738, 1740, 1741. Numerous outbreaks followed with the last one occurring in 1920. Yellow fever which had been gone for many years reappeared in 1794 and following summers for many years.

After the Revolution of 1804 and during the time of Emperor Jean Jacques Dessalines (1804-1807) everything stopped and there was a decline not only in medicine but also in every phase of civilization. He wanted no "whites" in his empire and there were no trained Haitian medical personnel. During the time of King Henri Christophe (1807-1811) much progress was made. Commercial treaties were made with the British and stores started to appear. He imported English and American schoolteachers and began building schools. Université de l'Etat in Port au Prince was founded with origins dating back to the 1820s, when the colleges of medicine and law were established.



Almost nothing can be found concerning medicine in rural Haiti during the 19th Century after 1804 with witchery and herb concoctions used for treatment. "Raffraichissants" (refreshment drinks) were believed to be necessary for the prevention of many diseases. Lemonade, citronade, orange juice, and pineapple juice were popular as were emulsions made from almonds and melon seeds.

After the turn of the century, following much political upheaval came the American Occupation (1915-1934). The US endeavored to rebuild Haitian infrastructures which included hospitals in the major cities.

Malaria, Yaws (tropical infection of the skin, bones, and joints, which mostly affects children), Intestinal parasites and tetanus had no medical relief for many years and were commonly prevalent in the rural populace. Yaws was considered a most dire situation. Only in 1922 clarity came with the arrival of Dr. Paul W Wilson, Public Health Officer of Jacmel, who treated it with arsenicals and saw yaws lesions fade away. He figured out that headaches, rheumatic pains, and a multitude of bizarre symptoms of most adults were based on old yaws infections for which potassium iodide did wonders.

Dr. Wilson wanted to see rural dispensaries in remote mountain villages. He said what Haiti needed was soap, salvarsan (organo-arsenic compound), and sunshine; "Bon Dieu" (God) furnishes the sunshine.

Alongside of rural government clinics many religious institutions started providing limited healthcare. Hôpital Bon Samaritain began in 1953 as such a rural clinic in Limbé which only had a population of 3,000 which is now close to 75,000.

Hodges House children

The 2019/2020 school year for all the Hodges House children has been confusing and very chaotic. First with the closing of schools in 2019 due to unrest in the country and then the closing due to Covid-19 in 2020. Thankfully, the kids were finally to finish and pass the school year in October 2020 with high marks.

The new school year 2020/2021 started in November and we hope they will be able to complete this school year uninterrupted.

After staying home, all eight children were excited to go back to school. Wency (red shirt), the youngest, entered 1st grade and is adapting well to the increased work requirement. He is an energetic and bright boy who always wants to be a part of what is going on. The three girls Jessica, Geralda and Vanessa (bottom left to right) are in 3rd grade. Reece (blue shirt) and Louvens (orange shirt) are in 6th grade, Chebanie is in 8th grade, and the oldest of the lot Guivenson (green and blue shirt) is in 9th grade.

As he is the oldest, Guivenson believes he is the leader. He and Chebanie are particularly good helping the four little ones with their homework.



Chebanie spends lots of time with the girls and Wency, while the older boys play together. Currently they are all super excited for the Christmas holiday and counting down the days. We would like to thank all, who have and continue to help contributed to the bright future of these kids.

Happy Holidays!

Though 2020 has been a very demanding year, we want to wish everyone the warmth of the Holiday spirit and the love of family and friends.

All the best wishes for the New Year!

Please note that we have a new physical address for material donations:

HBS Foundation, Inc.
2604 SW Conch Cove Ln
Palm City, FL 34990

For all other donations please use:

HBS Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 2564
Palm City, FL 34991

Phone: (561) 246-3360
E-mail: hbsfl@att.net
Registration: CH21155

