

# Konbit Sante

CAP-HAITIEN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP



(Left to right) Dr. Youseline Telemaque with a healthy baby, traditional birth attendant and community organizer Mme. Bois, Konbit Sante *agent sante* Odile César, and Dr. Eva Lathrop talk outside Mme. Bois' house in the Shada neighborhood of Cap-Haitien.

## The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Recognizes Konbit Sante physicians for Research in Cap-Haitien

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere where women are often the sole providers in families that survive on less than one dollar a day per capita. Just 600 miles

from our own borders, one in five Haitian children does not survive to the age of eight and the rate of maternal mortality is sixty times greater than in the U.S — with a ratio of 670 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births.

At the recent national conference of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, colleagues Eva Lathrop, MD, MPH, a U.S. OB/GYN and head of

Maine-based Konbit Sante Cap-Haitien Health Partnership's women's health team, and Youseline Telemaque, MD, a Haitian OB/GYN and employee of Konbit Sante in Haiti, were recognized for their research evaluating family planning practices and needs in northern Haiti. Lathrop and

Telemaque's research involved extensive interviews with both medical providers and postpartum patients at the Justinian University Hospital, the largest public teaching hospital in northern Haiti which houses one of Haiti's three OB/GYN residency programs.

"We surveyed hundreds of postpartum women to garner further information regarding their experiences with contraception, their desired family size, barriers to achieving this, desired spacing intervals, as well as barriers to using contraception at all," says Lathrop. The survey also queried women about their desire for contraception in the immediate and extended postpartum period, and the response was overwhelmingly in favor of having access to more family planning information prior to leaving the hospital.

Census data from Haiti shows that only 25 percent of sexually active women use contraception, and 60 percent of those not using contraception would like to do so. Not unexpectedly, the majority of women interviewed by Lathrop and Telemaque also

expressed a desire to either space or limit their pregnancies, citing profound economic hardship as a primary reason. They also shared misconceptions and fears — passed on through informal networks of family and friends — related to the safety and efficacy of various contraceptive options.

"From interviews with health care providers we learned that none had any experience initiating family practice

## Konbit Sante and Direct Relief International Prepare for Hurricane Season

Maine-based Konbit Sante Cap-Haitien Health Partnership and California-based Direct Relief International have teamed up to preposition more than \$450,000 worth of critical medical supplies — the contents of a 40-foot container — at the Justinian University Hospital in northern Haiti.

Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, has a tragic history of natural disasters during the June to November hurricane season. Haiti is particularly vulnerable, not only because of its Caribbean location in the path of dangerous tropical storms, but also because of widespread deforestation. The first deforestation occurred during colonial times when vast tracts of land were cleared for sugar production. Now, because of lack of affordable alternative cooking fuels, trees continue to be cut for charcoal production, thus creating the conditions conducive to landslides and flash flooding.



Donated equipment and supplies are unloaded by hand at Justinian University Hospital from one of ten shipments Konbit Sante has sent to date.

In 2004, Tropical Storm Jeanne dropped 13 inches of rain on the northern mountains of Haiti, causing flooding that killed more than 3,000 people in the town of Gonaives and surrounding areas. During 2008, four back-to-back storms devastated villages, homes, crops, and livestock, causing major suffering and loss of life. The situation was made even worse by storm-related shipping delays. After last year's storms, road washouts caused disaster relief as well as basic medical supplies to take four to six weeks to reach affected areas, despite being immediately released from donor warehouses. The country now braces for the 2009 hurricane season.

"Having adequate supplies to provide decent health care is a struggle every day in Haiti," says Konbit Sante executive director, Nate



Healthy baby and mom in the densely-populated Shada neighborhood of Cap-Haitien.

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"It was clear to us that the door was open for education efforts at all levels of our system and that this training has the potential to make an extraordinary impact from a public health perspective."

## Recognition *continued*

discussions with patients immediately postpartum,” says Lathrop, who did her OB/GYN residency at Maine Medical Center in Portland and is currently a Family Planning Fellow at Emory University in Atlanta. “At the same time, they expressed great concerns about the incidence of unsafe



Dr. Telemaque meets with traditional birth attendants and Konbit Sante agents sante to provide education and collect data about birth outcomes.

abortions and maternal mortalities and felt these could be reduced by improving postpartum family planning services.” Prevention of unplanned pregnancies is one of the most effective approaches to decreasing maternal mortality, and thus family planning strategies are proposed as a method of primary maternal mortality prevention. Focusing on the postpartum population allows women to space and limit their pregnancies during a high risk period for unintended repeat pregnancy.

According to Lathrop, “Family planning programs have been successfully integrated into other services in Haiti, specifically voluntary programs testing clients for HIV/AIDS, so there is every reason to believe that a family planning program can successfully become part of the postpartum services offered at the hospital and other centers providing maternity care.”

Lathrop and Telemaque have already begun using the findings of their research to implement family planning training for health care providers at the Justinian University Hospital in both the maternity and pediatric services. To reach out into the community, Telemaque has initiated ongoing reproductive health education for traditional birth attendants who deliver the vast majority of the babies in the area.

“It was clear to us that the door was open for education efforts at all levels of our system and that this training has the potential to make an extraordinary impact from a public health perspective,” says Telemaque. “It will take time and careful, culturally-appropriate interventions, but it is well within our capacity to help my Haitian colleagues become comfortable with reproductive and sexual health education. Obviously, in a country long suffering with high rates of HIV infection, the impact here will extend far beyond family planning.”

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### HAITIAN PROVERB

*Pise marengwen ogmante larivyè.*

*Even a mosquito's urine increases the river.*

*Every little drop counts.*

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## Hurricane Preparation *continued*

Nickerson. “Every day Haitian health care providers face chronic shortages of life-saving medications, supplies, and equipment that limit their ability to provide care. But in the context of a humanitarian disaster, the urgency is amplified many fold. Now, with the appropriate medical supplies stockpiled and ready, lifesaving resources will be immediately available when the next emergency arises.”

The container carrying the Direct Relief International resources is currently in transit from California to Cap-Haitien. Should Haiti be fortunate enough to not suffer natural disasters this year, the supplies and pharmaceuticals will be integrated into the inventory of the local public hospitals and clinic and a new container will be prepositioned for the following year. The supplies will be warehoused at Justinian University Hospital and managed by our new staff member, Nadine Mondestin.

In March 2009 Brett Williams, Emergency Response Coordinator for Direct Relief International and Dan Smith, Senior Program Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean for Direct Relief International, visited Cap-Haitien to meet with Konbit Sante and review procedures for management and distribution of medical equipment and supplies. “Working with Konbit Sante is a natural fit,” says Williams. “They have a proven track record, and both the relationships and commitment that show they plan to be there for the long run. Most



Brett Williams (left) and Dan Smith of Direct Relief International visit the supply depot at Justinian University Hospital in Cap-Haitien in March to discuss equipment and supply needs.

importantly, they care about changing the way things are done. We have a thoughtful partner in Konbit Sante and look forward to growing the relationship over time.”

Direct Relief International, based in Santa Barbara, is a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to improve health and lives of people affected by poverty, disaster, and civil unrest. Established in 1948, Direct Relief International strengthens the efforts of its partners through provision of financial, technical, and essential medical material resources. Direct Relief International currently ships containers of medical equipment and supplies to 58 countries.

To learn more about Direct Relief International, please visit [www.directrelief.org](http://www.directrelief.org).

## World Health Statistics 2009

World Health Statistics 2009 contains WHO's annual compilation of data from its 193 Member States, and includes a summary of progress toward the health-related Millennium Development Goals and targets. This edition also contains a new section on reported cases of selected infectious diseases.

For more information about this report please go to <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2009/en/index.html>.

### From the 2009 World Health Organization Report on Health Statistics

	Maternal Mortality	Neonatal Mortality	Medical Staff per 10,000 Population		
	per 100,000 Live Births	per 1,000 Live Births	Physicians	Nurses	Dentists
United States	11	4	26	94	16
Dominican Republic	150	18	19	18	8
Haiti	670	32	3	1	<1

## Crafters Create Caps for Newborns

More than 5,000 soft baby caps and hundreds of baby blankets have been created by crafty parents, grandparents, school, scout and church groups in 13 countries in response to Maine blogger Amanda Soule Blake's call for “Caps for Cap-Haitien.” These beautiful caps and blankets have been sent to Cap-Haitien and are distributed in the community by traditional birth attendants. Our thanks to Amanda ([www.mamatomama.org](http://www.mamatomama.org)) and her network of crafters for supporting our women's health initiative to improve birth outcomes in northern Haiti.



Some of the hundreds of baby caps created for the “Caps for Cap-Haitien” program.

### May we send you occasional E-news?

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### We Welcome Your Comments:

[info@konbitsante.org](mailto:info@konbitsante.org) or [info@healthyhaiti.org](mailto:info@healthyhaiti.org).

Letter from the Executive Director:

## Helping the Heroes

Dear Friends,

Konbit Sante's mission is to find ways to work together, or form a *konbit* between volunteers and staff in the U.S. and their colleagues in Haiti, to build the capacity of the Haitian health care system in Cap-Haitien. Ultimately, a functional health system will result in improved health status in the community. In fact, that would be the measure of a truly functional system. We feel that providing supportive collaboration and finding ways to empower people to improve their own system rather than developing separate or parallel systems of care is the most effective, sustainable and dignified approach.

Since the beginning of our partnership eight years ago, we have thought a lot about what it takes to build capacity. Though we don't claim to be the authority on this matter, there are a number of things that we have learned. At the most basic level, it seems to me, there are two things that a system needs in order to be capable — it requires functional infrastructure, and it needs able people. Both are essential. Indeed, if you have either one without the other, the impact will be limited. But, if I had to prioritize, I would say that the single most important element to success is having the right people in places where they can make a difference. A good infrastructure — good management, supply-chain, adequate facilities, program design — is incredibly important, but trying to realize a good result without having the right people in place is not possible. On the other hand, if you can find and engage the people with the passion and skills to make things better, they will make progress under even the direst conditions.

Konbit Sante's approach is to try to build capacity in both of these areas, but I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the human resource aspect of what we are trying to do. In the field of public health, there is a concept called "positive deviance". I think that it provides us with an important insight. We know that in every group of people, in every community, there are "outliers" — people who are not average. We often associate the word "deviant" with something negative; however some people are outliers, or deviant, in a very positive sense. They have unusual skills that could help others.

I was recently struck by the following quote from Paul Collier's book, "The Bottom Billion," in which he describes his thoughts about how to improve the plight of the one-sixth of the world's population who live in abject poverty. He wrote,

*Let me be clear: we cannot rescue them. The societies of the bottom billion can only be rescued from within. In every society of the bottom billion there are people working for change, but usually are defeated by the powerful internal forces stacked against them. We should be helping the heroes.*

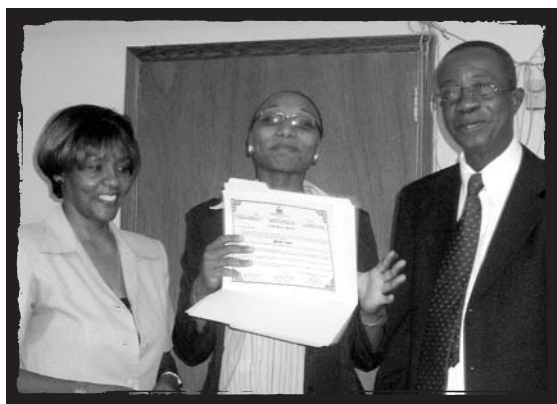
I believe the heroes that he is talking about are the "positive deviants" in the health system. With your help, we hope to continue to help some local heroes be successful in positions where their presence can make a real impact. In this newsletter I hope you will notice that the stories are not just about what the U.S. members of the Konbit Sante team are doing in Haiti, but also about the amazing work of the Haitian team members and facilitators we have the pleasure to know and support, and who make these programs work.



Nathan M. Nickerson, RN, MSN, DrPH  
Executive Director

## Konbit Sante Receives Official NGO Status

Konbit Sante was recently awarded legal NGO (non-governmental organization) status in Haiti. This is a similar recognition and status as a 501(c)3 non-profit is in the US. "While the



Emmanuela Béliard (center), Konbit Sante's in-country program manager, receives the official NGO certificate in Port-au-Prince. Also pictured are (from left) Mme Preptie Carole, Chief of service at UCAONG (*Unité de Coordination des Activités des ONG* or Coordination Unit for NGO Activities), and Mr Beaudelaire Petit Frère, Coordinator at UCAONG.

process was quite rigorous, we believe that it was a very important step for the organization," according to Nate Nickerson, Konbit Sante executive director. "First of all, we feel that it is right and important to recognize the laws and regulations of our host country in this way, and it will also give us several opportunities to increase the impact of our work." Having NGO status in Haiti allows Konbit Sante to bring in additional medical supplies and equipment, and it may open up additional funding opportunities from organizations that require this recognition within the country. NGO status requires us to have a Haitian board of directors, which is now being established in Haiti to monitor our impact on the ground and recommend strategic directions.

## Florida Firefighters Provide Fire Safety Training at Justinian Hospital

Justinian University Hospital has suffered two major fires during the past few years — one that burned the *Salle Privée* (private ward) and nearby buildings. The second fire destroyed the cardiology ward and the shared office of Konbit Sante and the University of Miami-Haiti Project. Fortunately, no lives were lost, but these fires resulted in significant loss of property and interruption of patient care.



(Left to right) Florida fire safety team members Robert Belizaire, Gayle Nye, Gina Lasseur, and Nathan Lasseur in Cap-Haitien.

Through contacts with former Haiti Peace Corps volunteer, Chris Beyer, Konbit Sante was fortunate to be introduced to his organization, The Florida Association of Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and America (FAVACA), which agreed to sponsor fire safety training for the staff at Justinian Hospital. FAVACA in turn partnered with volunteers from Florida-based International Firefighters Assistance, Inc. (IFA) to accomplish the project. The three-day training was led by Lieutenant Nathan Lasseur, a firefighter/paramedic from West Palm Beach Fire Rescue with volunteer instructional staff members Captain Robert Belizaire from Davie Fire Rescue, retired firefighter/paramedic Gayle Nye and Haitian Creole translator Gina Lasseur from Florida.



Dr. Marie Leconte demonstrates the proper technique for extinguishing a fire.

According to Dr. Marie Leconte, head of anesthesiology and fire safety participant, this training is the first of its kind during her 26 years at Justinian Hospital.

The team's review of the hospital facility and procedures highlighted the need for protecting electrical wiring from tampering; establishing procedures for early warning and patient evacuation; installation of smoke detectors generously donated by West Palm Beach Fire Rescue, Davie Fire Rescue and Dania Beach Fire Rescue; and training in fire extinguisher operation and maintenance. The highlight of the training was a hands-on opportunity for 24 hospital staff to practice using fire extinguishers donated by Maine Medical Center to put out a demonstration fire set behind the hospital buildings by IFA instructors.

Our thanks to FAVACA ([www.favaca.org](http://www.favaca.org)) and IFA ([www.IFArelief.org](http://www.IFArelief.org)) for their generosity and expertise.

PROFILE

# Emmanuela T. Norcéide Béliard, RN In-Country Program Manager

In January, 2009, Emmanuela T. Norceide Beliard, RN became Konbit Sante's in-country program manager, replacing Dr.



Konbit Sante's In-Country Program Manager, Emmanuela T. Norcéide Béliard, RN

Fennel Coulanges. Originally from Cap-Haitien, Emmanuela received her training as a licensed nurse at Université Notre Dame d'Haiti and recently completed post-university studies to become certified as a

nurse specialist in community health. Prior to joining Konbit Sante, Mme. Béliard was a staff nurse, chief nurse of specialty clinics, and finally director of human resources and

coordinator of external partnerships, all at Hôpital Sacré Coeur, a private hospital in Milot.

"I'm the personal liaison between Konbit Sante and the other organizations and the MSPP [Ministry of health] and am working to improve communications between all the various organizations. Konbit Sante's approach is different," according to Ms. Beliard, "because we use the services of the Haitian professionals here – we all work together. I really like what I'm doing. Every day is a challenge."

"Emmanuela is an excellent addition to our team," says Konbit Sante executive director Nate Nickerson. "She is very organized, knowledgeable, and is assertive while being diplomatic. She has the skill-set and personal qualities to really help us maximize our impact and is an excellent representative both in Cap-Haitien and Port-au-Prince."

## WWW.HEALTHYHAITI.ORG The New Way to Access Konbit Sante

To make it easier to find us on the web, you can now access Konbit Sante either at our

old web address [www.konbitsante.org](http://www.konbitsante.org) or at our new address [www.healthyhaiti.org](http://www.healthyhaiti.org).

### The Konbit Sante newsletter is published by:

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## How You Can Help

Konbit Sante depends on the generous donations from individuals and organizations to fund its programs in Haiti. Donations of cash, stocks, or in-kind items are greatly appreciated. For more information about donating please visit [www.konbitsante.org](http://www.konbitsante.org) or [www.healthyhaiti.org](http://www.healthyhaiti.org).

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**Our Mission:** To support the development of a sustainable health care system to meet the needs of the Cap-Haitien community with maximum local direction and support.

Konbit Sante has worked in Haiti for eight years developing programs to improve health care for the people of northern Haiti through collaboration and empowerment. Konbit Sante maintains offices in Maine and Cap-Haitien, Haiti where it oversees programs in women's health, pediatrics, disease prevention, procurement and management of medical equipment and supplies, improvement of water quality at the regional hospital, and other community collaborations. In Haitian Creole, a *konbit* is a traditional Haitian method of working together to till your friends' fields as well as your own – a cooperative effort. *Sante* means health.



Parents and children outside the pediatric outpatient clinic watch an educational welcome video produced by Konbit Sante in collaboration with the Justinian Hospital's Women's Health Committee.

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