In November 2012 the government of Haiti and Ochsner Health System commenced a medical teaching partnership and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The successful outcome of the MOU is a strong indicator of Haiti’s commitment to partner with world class teaching institutions like Ochsner to enhance the health care delivery system in Haiti as the country continues to recover from the devastating effects of the 2010 earthquake. This mutually beneficial relationship also affords Ochsner a unique opportunity to pursue its mission to be a global leader in health care. This inaugural mission, which included four graduates of the Ochsner Clinical School of the University of Queensland (UQ), Dr. Richard Vinroot Jr. and Dr. Yvens Laborde, has successfully laid the foundation for future activities and rotations in Haiti.

The aim of this program is to provide an elective experience for UQ students who are interested in international health. Other goals are to educate students to become better physicians both abroad and domestically, improve their skills while working in challenging environments, and motivate them to serve those in underserved communities. The experience will involve clinical disciplines which include public health, infectious disease, tropical medicine and field medicine, as well as social disciplines which include community education, ethics and cultural awareness.

"The heart cannot feel what the eyes cannot see." This Haitian expression speaks to the challenges facing health care and providers in the US. The delivery of health care in the US has become so complex that we often lose sight of our true purpose, which is to serve and care for people. It is extremely important that we continue to nurture and develop in our young physicians that medicine is first and foremost a human experience. We should never allow the technical and complex tasks that we perform in the practice of medicine blind us of the fact that we are caring for people. For the simple reason that mindless and blind eyes performing complex tasks will not allow our hearts to feel what our patients are experiencing.

"The Medicine in Society Rotation will provide the students an opportunity to diagnose, treat and care for patients under very difficult conditions with limited resources, but more importantly the rotation will open their eyes so their hearts can fully appreciate that medicine is not just about the most advanced technology but is a human experience which requires a human connection." Yvens Laborde, M.D.
“The poverty I saw in Haiti pervaded many aspects of life, most notably health, the economy and education. Any approach to serving Haiti’s future must address all three areas in combination, as progress cannot be made in each independently. The economic poverty I saw in Haiti stood in stark contrast to the richness of the people’s culture and social customs. I was deeply impressed with their extensive family networks and the fact that, despite terrible challenges, most Haitians seemed relatively happy. Possibly the most impressive aspect of Haitian culture is the people’s pride in their history. The Haitian soul holds a fierce conviction in the value of independence and self-determination.” Ross Hoffman, UQ Student

“Having the opportunity to see & interact with patients within this community, and in this particular setting, was certainly eye-opening. The tour of the hospital included a visit to the hospitals ‘lab’, which was essentially a small, poorly lit room, equipped with two microscopes, some staining materials, and two very dedicated staff. The ‘pediatrics ward’ was a small space shared by three sick children and their concerned mothers; close quarters would be an understatement. It’s impossible to try and put oneself in the shoes of these patients, and I couldn’t help but constantly compare my surroundings to those of back home. Feelings of guilt and helplessness, coupled with a sense of relief that I would eventually return to the comforts of home, were overwhelming me, and this was only the beginning. One of my favorite moments of the trip was...as Katie and I were jostling around in the back seat of the SUV, feeling the carsickness settle in, on our tenth round of the same Bob Marley CD, she leaned over to me and asked ‘What do you think your family is doing right now?’ Considering that it was Thanksgiving Day, I replied, ‘probably drinking wine and sitting down to a lovely turkey dinner.’ She then asked ‘Aren’t you so happy to be here instead?’ We both laughed, but the truth was, that I was happy to be there. I was sad to be away from my family on such a special Holiday, but this was such a wonderful opportunity and experience that I was, in fact, incredibly happy to be there.” Emily Sineway, UQ Student

“I took this photograph as our group was walking through the village on the second afternoon we were in Mombin. Taking this opportunity to fully immerse ourselves amongst the community, explore the town and interact with the local population in this manner was enchanting. I think I can safely say that this stroll was one of our favorite and most memorable moments of the trip, and definitely not one that I will ever forget.”

Emily Sineway
"We made a special stop at the Université Notre Dame medical school, which was a really special part of the trip. Considering we had just completed our medical school training back home in New Orleans, looking at all these bright-eyed and eager Haitian students really brought home the fact that, when you remove the circumstances, we’re really all after the same thing, a great education and an opportunity to enrich the lives of others. Our last few days spent in Haiti were filled with continuing warm welcomes and delicious hospitality. I don’t know that I’ve ever encountered a more welcoming and inviting group of people than the Haitian communities within which we spent our time. This country, and its people, has touched and inspired me in a way that makes me confident I will return, so I believe it is not a question of if I’ll go back, but simply, a matter of when."

Emily Sineway, UQ Student

"In a country with the highest birth rate in the Western hemisphere and a population density ten times that of the United States, it seemed to me there were no loners. Haiti is a country of neighbors calling to one another, of motorcyclists with entire families of six riding together, of beeping horns and music. There are people everywhere-- gaggles of children, flocks of women and men at every village water pump, on every city street corner, standing together talking, laughing, arguing, rooting themselves firmly together in community. If there is one thing I want to remember from this experience, it was the overwhelming sense of community that was ever-present. The Haitians who I met and with whom I spoke were not all happy, vibrant souls you so often hear Americans who return from mission trips to less developed countries touting, but they had a sense of place and community that seemed almost romantic to me, the ever-roaming nomad. They knew where they belonged, where their home was, and that is no small thing. I wish I had left Haiti knowing exactly how to fix all the suffering and hardship and sickness in this tiny country, but the fact is, it’s not that simple. There’s no one-size fits all band aid or catch-all government policy to enact. There’s no amount of throwing money at a problem that will fix the living conditions of the majority of Haiti’s poor tomorrow. Like most true solutions in life. The juxtaposition of the interior conditions of the Port-au-prince hospital and its individual hospital patients confined within their sickness and the vibrant community lives most Haitians enjoyed outside the hospital perimeters is something I will not soon forget."

Katie Weyer, UQ Student
Current News

- First UQ student rotation
- Nueterra collaboration
- Haiti New Orleans Task Force established
- Planning of future clinic
- Infrastructure for water system

Additional Setbacks:

- Hurricane Isaac & Sandy
- 400,000 plus still in temporary housing
- Funding to complete clinic & water system

Ochsner Haitian Relief Fund

- Sponsored Ochsner Clinic Primary Care Center in underserved areas
- Provide basic education, health prevention and screenings for communicable diseases (HIV, TB, etc)
- On going opportunities for participation of Ochsner team interested in Global Health and Medicine
- Continue infrastructure and sustainability resources

Orphanage/Homeless Children Support

- Foyer Des Jeunes Filles De Dieu
- Oeuvres Notre Dame De Victoire
- Fondation de L’Espoir des Enfants Démunis (FEED)

Ongoing Needs and Future Projects

- Health
- Shelter
- Education
- Sustainability

To Help Haitian Earthquake Relief Efforts

http://www.ochsner.org/lp/haitianrelief/