

# Not Your Typical Day at the Beach

The best learning experiences have the power to broaden our world view. As Sam Fogas looks back on his summer 2012 medical mission trip with the nonprofit Preventive Health Strategies (PHS), he can report an earth-shaking new awareness.

“I heard about the things Preventive Health Strategies does down there, and I wanted to be a part of it,” he explains. The trip in July was, in every way, a revelation for this 18-year-old University of Minnesota freshman. He had no idea how hands-on his Haiti experience would be. He initially figured he was there for an adventure that would look good on his resume. Instead, “I did (medical) things I never imagined I’d get to do this early in my career.”

Sam’s assigned role on the team was triage—determining which patients coming through the door were most in need of immediate care. “Along with another pre-med student and a social worker, I took temperatures, checked blood pressure, and interviewed patients through a translator.”

To be sure, that was a valuable service and useful experience for a future medical practitioner. But Sam is more likely to tell his college classmates about standing by as Dr. Annette performed four in-the-moment surgeries. “We got to be right there to see her deal with a very bad bacterial arm infection, for one thing. She explained why she did one procedure and not another.”

The team set up in an orphanage to treat 135 people per day. For Sam, the most remarkable case was the man with a massive mouth tumor. “He was starving to death because of it! As Dr. Bosworth prepped him for surgery, the man spoke through the translator: ‘After God, I am in your hands.’ He went through

surgery to remove the tumor fully awake because there was no anesthetist.”

Suddenly, a small earthquake shook the makeshift operating room. Interpreters ran outside, fearing a repeat of the massive 2010 event in Haiti. The PHS medical team didn’t react to the tremors but stayed focused on completing the operation.

Sam’s photos testify to a schedule that included time for seeing the island nation beyond the makeshift clinic. “We met a man who makes black coral jewelry, and he invited us to his house. From the front, his village looked deserted. Yet, when we went around back, we saw a beach where boats were coming in and people constructed fishing nets and made lobster traps. They were cooking, too, and everybody was busy. I realized these were industrious people.”

If the team had ignored the jewelry maker’s request to come around to the backyard, Sam says he would have gone away with the same opinion most people form concerning Haiti or any impoverished area. The view from that backyard beach broadened his understanding of the world. Not surprisingly, he says, “I’d love to go to Haiti again.”

## READY TO HELP IN HAITI?

Apply for a spot on the next Haiti medical mission. Contact us at [haiti@meaningfulmedicine.org](mailto:haiti@meaningfulmedicine.org). Medical training isn’t necessary. Sam Fogas also helped dig a well and build a house while in Haiti.

