

FOCUS Mission: Eliminating Avoidable Blindness in Haiti

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Background

FOCUS's long-range mission is to Eliminate Avoidable Blindness in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with few resources and a weak government. There are over 11 million people and less than 15 cataract surgeons in the country to care for about 100,000 with cataract blindness, a treatable disorder with a single low-cost surgical procedure..

FOCUS was founded in the 1960's for eye care in Haiti and has partnered with the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) Foundation, SEE International, and university fellowship programs, to improve teaching at the sole eye residency at HUEH, the main Haitian government hospital. The model to be used is that of Aravind Eye Hospitals in India, using manual, small incision cataract surgery (MSICS) and the development of community outreach with Aravind's LAICO.

Dr. Nicholas Volpe has been active in residency education and cataract surgery teaching as Chair of Ophthalmology at Northwestern, providing him with a unique expertise in developing a residency education program. Dr. Volpe has also collaborated with the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) efforts to improve residency education across the globe.

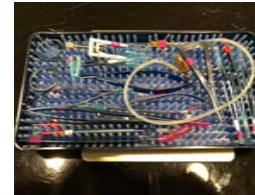
Goals

FOCUS intends to start by building a stronger sustainable residency affiliated with HUEH, the main government hospital, for private and some government public care. We will partner with several established NGOs and private Grace Hospital, as they are on the ground in Port au Prince, with connections to the local medical community and government. We have identified a local champion to be full time in education, surgery, and clinic supervision. Dr. Maingrette is one of only a handful of skilled surgical ophthalmologists proficient in manual small incision cataract surgery (MSICS), as well as having expertise in glaucoma, another major cause of blindness in Haiti.

Activities

Dr. Myers plans to be on the ground in Haiti several months annually, coordinating activities with the multiple entities, attending residents' MSICS cases at HUEH, and providing additional surgical training to postgraduate surgeons. The residents would attend didactics, observe and perform surgery, and be trained on newer diagnostic equipment. Activity has been slowed by COVID-19 and unrest in the country. Once a vaccine is available our team plans trips to begin the process of training the trainers, and organize wet labs, video linked didactics, 1:1 mentoring, and support for new practice facilities for the graduates.

Residency at HUEH and Wet Lab



Lessons Learned

Everything moves slowly in Haiti. Programs are built up, and government strikes or COVID may shut things down for a year at a time. Despite that, progress has been made, with a wet lab to continue self education in surgical techniques, didactic lectures given by francophone volunteer ophthalmologists from around the world via Skype, and great partners supplying consumables for surgical procedures. The resident pool has improved tremendously over the past 5 years of activity.

Implications

The delay in implementing long term ground operations has allow us to prepare for fundraising, program development, and coordinating with our partners. SEE International and ASCRS Foundation have committed to supplies and infrastructure support. We are close to receiving a USAID grant to tackle retinopathy of prematurity in partnership with Partners in Health and Zanmi Lasante. Support from the Buffett Institute for Global Affairs will enhance our ability to provide eye health services in Haiti.

Partners



GLOBAL EYE PROJECT



Importance

Most blindness in Haiti is treatable with either glasses for the young or a one-time surgical procedure for dense cataract requiring under 15 minutes and costing \$25 in supplies. Two people are freed to enjoy life and support their family when a person is no longer blind, as the caretaker can now contribute as well. More good is achieved by training the locals to sustainably care for their own through a program of training the trainers.