A Traditional Birth Attendant In Haiti: A Job Like No Other

By Gregory Leger and Fredline Desrosiers, GHA Haiti staff

In helping pregnant women give birth to their babies, matrones (Traditional Birth Attendants) play both a social and religious role in the community. A matrone is considered a gift to the community and participates in a sacred heritage. But more importantly, the birthing practices of matrones contribute to the survival of their communities.

Pregnant woman in rural Haiti prefer to give birth at home rather than at a hospital for the support that they receive at home from older relatives, matrones and other community members. Pregnant women in labor prefer home births also because hospitals and maternity homes are often too far away, expensive, and some offer poor quality of care. After birth, women and children receive emotional, economic and psychological support from family and community alike.

In the past, Haitian men were left out of the Traditional Birth Attendant profession by the force of puritanical traditions which held that only women could have anything to do with the reproductive health issues of women. But today, many men are dedicated to the therapeutic, religious and social practices surrounding the birth of a baby.

Jean Eddy Nérette, 36, a native of Vialet (in the commune of Petit-Goave), is one such chosen matrone in a long lineage of matrones; he has been a matrone since the age of thirteen. In a recent interview, he said that he inherited this gift in a dream. In this dream, the face of his late father appeared to him explaining “how to make a delivery and cut the umbilical cord without difficulty.”

Jean Eddy Nerette attended his first delivery in April, 1991. One day, he was out and about in town, when he heard the cries of a woman in distress. It was a pregnant woman in labor, so he went to her and offered his help. He laid his hand on the woman’s belly and helped her deliver her baby. Since that time, he has been recognized as a matrone by community members.

Since 2005, as part of its Maternal and Child Health project, Global Health Action has been organizing training workshops for traditional birth attendants on safe home birthing techniques. With this training, Jean Eddy Nerette was able to improve his practice and learn when to refer cases beyond his ability.

In recognition for his dedication, team
From the President and CEO

Dear GHA Friends and Supporters,

Global Health Action’s key strength is our ability to increase the knowledge and skills of our frontline health workers, rural livestock program participants, and our program partners for sustained impact on health and the quality of life in low-resource communities. This newsletter contains stories about the inspiring work that our traditional birth attendants and community health workers do each day in their communities to save lives and promote good health. They are there ready and equipped to respond when a crisis occurs, but just as important, they work continuously to promote health, prevent illness and disease, and provide basic care to prevent more serious complications and death.

Your support makes our programs possible to give children and adults the gifts of good health and livelihood opportunities for a brighter future. To put this in context, each year GHA can support, train, equip and supervise a Haitian Community Health Worker to regularly serve 700-1,000 people within their community, all for the equivalent cost of one person’s one-week trip to Haiti, including modest food and accommodations.

Please consider using the enclosed donation envelope to support these vital frontline health workers in Haiti or our other programs. Your partnership with and generous financial support for GHA helps us save and change lives for the better.

Thank you!

Robin C. Davis

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China: Involving More Communities with Left-behind Children

GHA and our Chinese partners know it takes a whole community to meet the overall health and life skills needs of left-behind children in rural China. In the schools, the teachers, counselors and peer student leaders learn and teach about adolescent health and how to make wise choices in life. At home, grandparents or community caretakers try to fill the parental roles of providing basic care, guidance, and love. Local police and other community leaders work to keep the children safe from violence, burns, traffic accidents and drowning, which occur all too often in rural areas where parents are absent.

In late May GHA President & CEO, Robin Davis, led a training workshop for 53 Chinese health leaders and school teachers from seven rural counties of Jiangsu Province. The workshop focused on developing community-based projects to improve the health and well-being of left-behind children and their elder caretakers. Each county committed to increasing community-based projects ranging from water and sanitation projects to child public safety and accident prevention classes to special education classes for grandparents and caretakers. Watch GHA’s website and Facebook page for future updates on our progress in rural China.
Haiti: A New GHA Initiative for Animal Health Workers and Goat Farmers

Rural life in Haiti had always been characterized by solidarity and togetherness. Agricultural work, based on mutual assistance and kombit (coming together in Creole) exemplified this solidarity. However, over time, this mode of community life, vital to the survival of rural communities, gradually declined in pursuit of urban employment.

GHA’s recent initiative in livestock fodder (food) cultivation in the Darbonne area has sought to return to this form of associative life. Through this project, GHA supported the capacity building of 21 community leaders on identifying indigenous fodder for small livestock. They were also trained on the nutritive values of the plants and on techniques to cultivate fodder for livestock. The community leaders in turn shared this knowledge with others who donated small plots of land that were used as demonstration plots. This initiative has improved the quality and value of small livestock by teaching community members how to provide fodder for their livestock in the dry season. Healthier livestock will have greater market value, fetch better sale prices in the market place and contribute to improved household food and economic security. This project was supported with a generous grant from Dunwoody United Methodist Church and the Haiti Fund of the Boston Foundation. Thank you for support!

Haiti: Thanks to Your Support, the Chlorhexidine Has Arrived!

Thanks to your generous donations, GHA has launched a pilot project in partnership with the School of Nursing, University of Illinois, Chicago to evaluate a behavior change campaign to improve infant health in Petit-Goave, Haiti. The community campaign aims to increase the proportion of women who apply chlorhexidine to their newborn’s umbilical cord daily for the first 7 days after birth while also not applying unhygienic substances to the cord during the first 4 weeks after birth. This protocol for cord care is being rolled out in Petit-Goave by GHA where we want to examine the effectiveness of the messaging.

This campaign is based on the World Health Organization’s (WHO) protocol for newborn care which is a daily application of chlorhexidine 4% (topical antiseptic) to the umbilical stump during the first week of life for newborns who are born at home in settings with high neonatal mortality. In the month of May 2014, GHA partnered with the Chlorhexidine Working Group to request a donation of 400 tubes of liquid chlorhexidine (7%) from Drugfield Pharma, a Nigerian pharmaceutical company that produces the drug. The shipment arrived in Atlanta in May and was immediately transferred to our Haiti office in June. After a series of refresher training workshops for the Traditional Birth Attendants and Community Health Workers, data collection for this project began in early September 2014.

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work and service to the community, Jean Eddy Nerette was promoted as one of two supervisors of GHA’s network of matrones. He said that he is proud to be a part of GHA’s health efforts in Petit-Goave.

Thanks to donations from supporters like you, Global Health Action improves the quality of services delivered by the traditional birth attendants by providing continuing education; distributing birthing kits; supporting on-the-ground supervisors and training pregnant and lactating women on health and hygiene. With GHA’s support and training, matrones are better able to detect complications in pregnancies and refer women to nearby health centers.

Matrones like Jean Eddy Nerette, who are trained and supported by Global Health Action, work to reduce maternal and infant deaths in Petit Goave. Matrones save lives!
The Hubert Foundation Changes Lives through GHA's Programs

Over the past twelve years, The Hubert Foundation has provided generous grant support to Global Health Action (GHA) to improve health in remote parts of the world. Richard N. Hubert, Esq. serves on The Hubert Foundation Board of Trustees with Co-trustees Dr. William H. Foege, a global leader in public health, and Mark S. Drake, Vice President, U.S. Trust.

Without hesitation, Richard Hubert tells why he and his family’s foundation actively support the health and rural development efforts of Global Health Action. “I quickly found out that public health is different. You get the most impact for your money and work with the greatest people in the world who have a missionary-like dedication and sense of mission to improve the health and lives of others. Global Health Action has a proven track record and a dedicated professional staff who have been working in Haiti for 32 years, building local leadership to serve year after year. I am proud to support GHA’s efforts and serve on the Board of Directors to help make a lasting difference in the world.”

Giving Through an Estate Bequest

Giving through an estate bequest can give you a great sense of satisfaction to know that your future gift will help sustain GHA’s work in developing countries. An estate bequest enables an individual’s philanthropic intent to be realized without relinquishing needed assets during his or her lifetime, while often minimizing income and estate taxes for surviving family members. A bequest through your will is simple and flexible:

- All that is needed is just a few sentences in your will.
- Estate bequests to GHA in your will can either be a fixed dollar amount or a percentage of the estate.
- Since the gift is not made until after your lifetime, you can always change your mind.

To discuss making a bequest to GHA through your will, call Joel Chasteen or Robin Davis at 404-634-5748 or email Joel at jchasteen@globalhealthaction.org.

Organizational Giving Channels for GHA Support

Combined Federal Campaign & Community Health Charities of the Southeast #10126
United Methodist Advance – Global Health Action #06504A and GHA-Haiti #418705
United Methodist Women Supplementary Gifts - mark “for Global Health Action”

Georgia Gives Day

On November 13, 2014, GHA will once again participate in Georgia Gives Day.

The goal of this annual giving event is to help raise as much money as possible for Georgia nonprofits in a single day.

Visit www.GAgivesday.org on 11/13 to donate to Global Health Action.

Thank you!