

COPA's MEDICAL FUND (2010)

During the past 19 years COPA has built two Health Centres in each of the two villages where they have established outstanding school campuses in the province of Barahona, in the relatively remote south west corner of the Dominican Republic.

Each Health Centre is built of reinforced concrete for the walls and roof, fully capable of withstanding hurricanes and earthquakes. The Health centres comprise a spacious waiting room and reception desk, two consulting rooms, a pharmacy and storage facilities. In La Hoya there is also an adjacent one bedroom apartment for use by a doctor. Having seen both Clinics in September 2010, I consider that the Consulting Rooms are almost on a par with those in most of the UK.

COPA's Volunteer Health Adviser supervises both Health centres and organises Health Education in the Clinics and the two schools. Each Health centre has a GP and a Nurse who are sometimes paid by the Government. The Government also provides a small amount of medication and drugs to each Clinic. Additional medical equipment and drugs are provided by COPA. There are also fairly regular Volunteer Medical Team visits by Doctors, Surgeons and Dentists from the United States who make use of the Health Centres, where they undertake surgery.

The work being done in each Clinic is absolutely amazing, and invaluable to both communities. Bombita and La Hoya are villages with a desperate need for better healthcare and education. All the money raised for the Medical Fund is used in a variety of ways to support surgery, develop health education, undertake immunizations and vaccinations in the schools, monitor the health of the schools' population or purchase drugs, medicines, equipment and resources for each clinic.

Surgical Team Visit (Feb 2010)

This involved a general surgeon, a gynaecologist and an ENT surgeon who visited for 4 days and undertook 23 surgeries – hernias, gall bladders, tonsils, cysts, vaginal reconstruction, ovary removal, treatment of Haitian toddlers six amputated digits, skin graft etc.

Children of the Nations Surgical Team Visit (March – April 2010)

13 operations undertaken (many from the Haitian Earthquake) – fractures, cataracts, tonsils, tendon and knee cap repair.

Doctors Strike

In September 2010 both Doctors eventually went on strike for a week because they hadn't been paid by the Government for over 3 months.

Medical Team Visit from North Carolina (November 2010)

The Team included specialist surgeons in: Paediatrics, Gynaecology, Minor Surgery and Dermatology. They were so busy crowd control had to be introduced and tickets issued. For example the Dermatologist alone saw between 350 and 400 patients per day for 4 days!

Dental Team Visit (June 2010)

Dentistry is the biggest need in both villages. The visiting Team spent 2 days in Bombita and a day in La Hoya. In total they extracted 61 teeth in 3 days – more in La Hoya than Bombita!

AIDS and the HIV PROGRAMME

Apart from the regular routine coughs, colds and flu that everybody gets both clinics are inundated by the problems of HIV. HIV has got a lot worse in the last year and at times the COPA Health Adviser and the Doctors appear almost unable to be able to cope with the huge surge in instances of HIV in Bombita and La Hoya. This surge has been particularly noticeable since the Haitian Earthquake and the in-migration of Haitians to Bombita. COPA estimates 6% of Bombita have HIV.

The COPA Health Adviser and the Doctors devise an HIV Program for each person affected. Children as young as 2 months old have been diagnosed with HIV. However there is a great deal of ignorance about the cause and nature of the disease. The COPA Health Adviser spends days each week in seeing HIV patients and in trying to ensure they take their medication and follow their Program. Unfortunately there is often a shortage of paediatric medication, which comes from the Government's Public Health Dept. in the capital. The COPA Health Adviser spends hours each week delivering education and counselling sessions, both in the COPA Clinic and also in homes in the two villages.

CHOLERA

The Haitian Cholera outbreak created much concern in Bombita where there were many new Haitian immigrants, following the January earthquake. COPA's Health Adviser organised meetings of all the teachers to educate them about the cause, symptoms, treatment and prevention of cholera. A second meeting was organised for parents. This was followed by further talks and education both in each class and in the villages. COPA also bought hand sanitizer containers to place in each classroom.

IMMUNIZATION AND VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS

In April and June COPA organised immunization sessions in the schools for both the children and the adults. Children received jabs for Polio, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertusis, and Measles.

TRAINING OF YOUTH TO BE HEALTH PROMOTERS

In September COPA's Health Advisor and the COPA Administrator started a series of 20 one hour sessions to train 10 youths to be leaders and health promoters in their community.

SEX EDUCATION

In October and November, very successful Sex Education classes were organised by the Doctor and COPA's Health Adviser for students in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLASSES

These were established to educate the school students into the re-use and recycling of waste materials and the safe disposal of solid wastes.

WEIGHT ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING

In addition to all the above jobs that the Health Adviser undertakes, weighing all of the younger students is an important aspect of the role. This is to establish the degree of malnourishment in the villages, and more particularly, find the specific children at risk of malnutrition.