

Tulane alumni provide primary care in Haiti

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Tulane alumna Dr. Alison Smith, left, who graduated with an MD/PhD, attends to a patient with a finger abscess in Jacsonville, Haiti, as part of the Sante Total primary care clinic. Smith founded the clinic. (Photo provided by Sante Total)

Near the Haitian town of Jacsonville, residents often don't seek medical advice until they are extremely sick. People have little money to spend on medicine. But the [Sante Total clinic](#), founded by Tulane University School of Medicine graduate Dr. Alison Smith, travels to Haiti to offer primary care every few months, and now the clinic is building a permanent location.

Sante Total is in a growth phase, said Smith, now a surgery resident at Tulane.

"We're trying to form the permanent clinic, which will be a huge step in having a formalized structure," said Smith. "Once we do that, we want to expand to have other services, such as surgical services."

The organization and clinic are run by executive director Dr. Barbara Weis, a Baltimore pediatrician and former Peace Corps volunteer who earned an MD/MPH from Tulane.

"We see a real mix of patients in the clinic," said Weis. "A whole range of things from chronic high blood pressure to congestive heart failure."

But the doctors also have to be prepared for tropical diseases like malaria and cholera and accidents that are common to the population.

Doctors, residents and medical students, many of them Tulane-affiliated, travel to Jacksonville three times annually for weeklong stays, usually at personal expense.

Margarite Matossian, who is pursuing an MD/PhD degree from Tulane, recruits medical students from Tulane and LSU.

"I've always been interested in global healthcare, but as a medical student I wasn't sure how to optimally combine my interests of patient care with community involvement" before Sante Total, she said.

To better serve Jacksonville, Sante Total partners with area physicians, works toward improving issues like sanitation and water quality, and even trains local personnel.

"We are very respectful of what the local leaders tell us that they need," Smith said.

The clinic's benefits travel both ways.

"The experience with Sante Total has been life-changing," Weis said. "It has renewed my commitment to the Hippocratic Oath I swore so long ago at Tulane."

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