

Mildred M. G. Olivier, MD

Dr. Olivier describes the challenges of health care delivery in Haiti and the lure of Chicago.

What are the challenges of delivering eye/glaucoma care in Haiti, and how have they changed since the earthquake?

Haiti was a land of challenges for medical care even before the earthquake. It is a country of nearly 10 million people but only some 50 ophthalmologists to meet the population's eye care needs. Problems like glaucoma and cataract are overwhelming there. The former is a particular scourge, because the people in Haiti develop the disease at an earlier age than other population groups. Moreover, glaucoma is more damaging, progresses faster, and is less responsive to treatment than in other populations; I believe it is probably a different disease than we see in the United States among blacks. A lack of infrastructure—roads, medical facilities, skilled medical practitioners—always made treating eye problems extremely difficult.

The earthquake affected Haitian ophthalmologists just as it did everyone else in the country. These physicians' offices and equipment were destroyed. Travel became much more problematic. Today, it is even harder to reach patients who need eye care and to connect them with required medications.

That said, better regulation of all those coming to help Haitians with eye problems is needed to ensure that people are properly credentialed. Even more important is increasing the ability of Haiti's physicians to care for their patients. Doctors there need to increase their surgical skills through continuing education and to have access to equipment. Moreover, young people must be inspired to enter the profession so that a greater number of patients can be helped.

I should note that a great deal has been accomplished in Haiti because of the AAO's Task Force on Haiti. Under the leadership of Michael Brennan, MD, more than \$1 million worth of equipment and medical supplies has been distributed to earthquake-ravaged areas.

You are no stranger to media appearances. What was it like to be on "The Dr. Oz Show"?

I have been on Dr. Oz's show twice and helped with a third. They were great experiences. Media appearances

always go by in a flash. Because people tune in to be entertained, hosts need to be bright, engaging, and informative, and they must have a definite sense of humor. Dr. Oz has all of those characteristics, which makes his show a success.

Because of the short segments media requires, it is hard to provide the same depth of information that you can during one-on-one talks in your office. For that reason, the best approach is to use media appearances to direct viewers to other resources such as Web sites and telephone help lines. That way, millions of viewers' awareness of medical issues is heightened, and they discover channels of more detailed information. Mentioning the Web addresses for programs such as

Eye Care America, Prevent Blindness America, and National Eye Help Education Program drove visitors to those sites, which was highly rewarding for me.

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FAST FACTS

- Founder and CEO of the Midwest Glaucoma Center, 1993 to present
- Associate professor of ophthalmology at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, Department of Ophthalmology, John H. Stroger, Jr Hospital of Cook County, 2008 to present
- AAO Delegate to the AMA, 1991 to present
- AAO Task Force on Haiti Recovery, 2010 to present
- Vice president (2005-2007) and member of the Board of Directors (2010-2012) of the Women Physicians Congress
- President-elect for 2013, Women in Ophthalmology
- Recipient of the Benjamin F. Boyd Humanitarian Award at the 29th Pan-American Congress of Ophthalmology, 2011
- Recipient of the AMA's Dr. Nathan Davis International Award for Medicine, 2011
- Prevent Blindness America's 2010 Person of Vision
- Participant in more than 40 medical missions to Haiti/Caribbean, 1993 to present
- Past participant in the AAO choir

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What is your number-one tip for transitioning to electronic medical records?

Do your homework. That means (1) learning about the available systems and (2) determining what your needs are. After making a list of companies that offer electronic medical records, talk to other people who are using them. Test several systems. Designate a team of individuals from your office to identify what is needed and make a list of those requirements. Find out how the various companies can provide the things you need.

Another hot tip: start e-prescribing while there are physician incentives for doing so. E-prescribing is the process of sending patients' prescriptions directly to pharmacies by e-mail. It improves the speed and accuracy of the prescribing process and offers greater convenience to your patients.

I am on the American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives' Committee for Electronic Health Records, and the Web site (http://www.aao.org/aaosite/promo/business/ehr_central.cfm) offers a great resource for information to keep physicians and their staffs updated. We are always actively working toward making courses available for individuals with small and large businesses who have not yet implemented electronic health records. We also provide updates for those who have "gone live" and must continue to learn about new options or address concerns after implementation. I am lucky to be around so many talented, educated individuals who want to help others.

What influence have your parents had on your life?

They had a lot to do with my becoming a physician. Later, I stumbled into ophthalmology, probably through purely divine intervention. My mother and father were both from Haiti and raised me to believe that, if you set your mind to anything, it becomes possible. They never thought that there were limitations to what my brothers and I could accomplish. We were the first generation of my family born in the United States, and we could see how hard my parents both worked to ensure that we had everything we needed.

My mother was a registered nurse, a very giving person, and raised us in that tradition. Rather than trick or treat for candy, I was more interested in collecting money for UNICEF from a very early age. In college, I volunteered to work with autistic children. My mother was constantly helping people from Haiti get established for a better life. It was always about helping, giving back, and paying it forward. I have received much more than I have given.

My dad is a great guy. He went to medical school fairly

late, so when I went, it was almost like sharing our collegiate careers. Now that he has retired, my dad helps me out with my practice and has always encouraged me on my medical missions to Haiti. He has also been accompanying me to many meetings for several years since my mother passed away from hepatitis C. As a result, I have been able to spend lots of time with him, and he has met many of my friends and colleagues over the years. My dad is now 86 and beginning to slow down, but he is still active and enjoys being a snowbird for half the year in Florida.

The genes, the struggles, and the experiences that I received from generations of my family made me essentially who I am today. In all, I enjoy everything I do on a daily basis, because the practice of medicine has taught me that life is not promised to any of us. I try to keep a positive attitude, smile, and have one of those laughs that comes from deep down in my gut! I have been blessed with a great family, friends, and patients who appreciate my dedication to my practice.

What are the best things Chicago has to offer?

Chicago is a wonderful city. Its central location in the United States is convenient to almost everywhere. Because it was rebuilt almost from scratch after the Great Fire, Chicago is a fairly modern city with landmark architecture, excellent parks, and well-engineered roadways. We have beautiful Lake Michigan, miles of bicycle paths, four- and five-star hotels, and fantastic restaurants and museums. On the medical side, Chicago has great universities and medical schools, with many fine medical centers conveniently located in the city and suburbs.

I like to attend performances of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I enjoy dining at restaurants like Sepia, Joe's Stone Crab, and the Mid America Club. There's a movie-dinner theater right by my suburban office. Every June, the booths for Taste of Chicago are erected right across the street from where I live. Throughout the summer, I take a glass of wine up onto my roof on the weekend so that I may enjoy the fireworks over Lake Michigan. Even winter is beautiful here. I love the weeks around Christmas, especially when patient schedules are not crazy. The lights, decorations, and people's high spirits are enchanting, and I delight in taking part in the city's annual Do-It-Yourself Messiah, for which the audience serves as the chorus backed by an orchestra.

During my training in Detroit and New York City, I used to rave about Chicago. People would get sick of it, but once they came to visit, they appreciated my accolades. □