



Prescribing Prevention

An Enhancement to the St. Eustace Medical
Mission to the Dominican Republic
2008 Update

Cover Photos

Left: The Lake Placid, NY St. Eustace Episcopal Church congregation collects plastic buckets to send to the Dominican Republic for use in home water purification.

Right: The home water purification device used in the Dominican Republic. This device consists of two 5 gallon plastic buckets, bucket lids, a black plastic spigot; plus, inside the buckets, there are a yarn-wrapped 1.0 micron filter and a granular activated carbon cartridge. This device is economical and effective for treating an adequate supply of water for the needs of an extended family. Given reasonable care, plus a new filter every year and a new granular activated carbon cartridge every two years, this home water treatment system can be expected to produce safe water for 10 years or more. The Prescribing Prevention program will provide replacement filters and granular activated carbon cartridges as needed.

Copyright Paul Gutmann March 18, 2008

Prescribing Prevention
In the Dominican Republic
2008 Update

This was my second trip to the Dominican Republic riding on the apron strings of the medical mission team launched from the St. Eustace Episcopal Church by Robin Baxter.* Knowing what to expect, having prepared extensively, and having survived – even succeeded – on the first trip still did not keep me from worrying about not being up to the task. The language barrier is immense, the cultural barrier is largely unfathomable, and like the doctors, the nurse practitioner, and the physicians’ assistants on the medical team, my success or failure could mean the difference between life and death. Would my best effort be enough? It is uncomfortable and even scary to have such a burden on your shoulders. Upon arrival in the Dominican Republic, I drew comfort from a prayer adapted from a quotation by the boxer, Mohammad Ali:

Learn all you can;
Set up your plan;
But have faith when your preparations are through:
If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread,
God sure’ll make something out of you.

Well, my prayer was answered, and my performance this year, like my performance last year, was way beyond my best ability. Much, much more was accomplished than anyone would have dreamed possible. Furthermore, it was not only so with MY work, but every member of the medical team was functioning way beyond his or her previous personal best. Perhaps it was the



Robin Baxter * (red blouse center) and the 2008 Dominican Republic Medical Mission Team.

adrenaline or the contagious nature of being in a group of overachievers, but I like to think that, simply, my prayer was answered, generously.

At the first site, Gautier (a rural community inland from Boca Chica), we found that the St. Thomas Church had made a good start with last year’s program to distribute home water purification systems. It was encouraging to see that many people in the community are very satisfied with the performance of these home systems and are happy to have their families’ health in their own hands. Last year, when I asked the moms if they sent their children to school with a bottle of safe water, not one answered “yes”. This year the answer to that question was sometimes “yes”. Perhaps the answer changed because of my hygiene lessons, but perhaps the answer changed because now they could actually purify water in their homes and had safe water to put in a bottle. Unfortunately, although kids were sent to school with safe water, the safe water mostly came home with them at the end of the day. Peer pressure seems to say that drinking from your water bottle is “un-cool”. That perception must change, so I have made a note to try to establish a “Safe Water Day” in the local schools when, every year, students are taught about the importance of safe water and how trendy it is to walk around sipping from a bottle of pure water.

*Robin saves lives routinely at her job as recovery room nurse. She is greedy and has organized the medical mission to the Dominican Republic for 10 years because she wants to save even more lives.

I was very impressed with the committee that was set up at the St. Thomas Church to distribute the home water purifier systems. There were four people on the committee, and they were not only capable of instructing people in the use of the purifiers, but they were enthusiastic advocates of home water purification. These folks will ensure that the home water purification program will continue to grow in the future.

Like last year at Gautier, any of the people who were treated for waterborne illnesses were sent to me to be instructed about hygiene and to be informed about the availability of the home water purifiers. Although all the folks who attend the St. Thomas Church know about the home water purifiers, the clinic attracts people who are not church members, and many of these folks do not yet know about the home water purifier distribution program. My presence at the clinic was, thus, an excellent way to promote home water purification beyond the church membership and beyond the local community. Many home water purifiers were distributed during the clinic.

It was very nice to be able to distribute the extra buckets that were collected during the Lake Placid community bucket drive of March 13, 2008. Since, in Gautier, “running water” means that you do the running with a bucket, these extra buckets are necessary to transport water from the community spigot to the home. We had a limited-time-only offer of an extra bucket with every home water purifier system that we distributed, and the folks who got their systems during the three days that we had the offer really appreciated the extra bucket. Isn't it nice to see plastic buckets that might end up in our garbage be utilized so appreciatively?



Teaching about hygiene, safe water, and the use of the plastic bucket home water purification device (delivered cost, \$40.00) at the Gautier site in the Dominican Republic

The medical team spent the last two days at the Buen Pastor (Good Shepherd) site. Buen Pastor is a church, school, and clinic site in the Las Flores slum of the city of San Pedro de Macoris. Many hundreds or even thousands of people live in this slum in extremely poor living conditions. Lately, living conditions took a decided turn for the worse because the municipal water system has failed almost completely. The Buen Pastor complex has to get its water from a truck. The trucked water is used to flush toilets and for washing. Buen Pastor tries to maintain a tank of water from the municipal water system to serve as raw water for Buen Pastor's little water treatment plant, but the padlock that protects the tank was broken by thieves who steal the water. In spite of the thieves, similarly to last year, we made 500 gallons of purified, safe drinking water with the little water treatment plant. This year, I was able to convince everyone that the purified water that we produced was really safe to drink. So, they promised to continue to operate the plant and provide safe water to the community.

How do I know that the water is safe, and how did I convince the Dominicans that it was safe? I know because I have a lot of experience with municipal water treatment equipment and procedures. My 27 years of experience with water treatment plant operation give me faith in this equipment and procedures. In addition, I sent the folks at Buen Pastor equipment and materials for a simple and foolproof test for the presence or absence of coliform bacteria. The only piece of equipment that I was not able to send was an incubator. Incubators are expensive and hard to ship. However, the bacteria that needed to be incubated should be incubated at exactly 98.6 degrees F – body temperature. I simply incubated these bacterial tests like a mother hen incubates its eggs - with body heat. I carried the test bottles in my pocket, day and night, for 48 hours. (Of course, this meant that I had to have pockets in my pajamas.) The Dominicans gave me some odd looks when I told them that I was doing what a hen does. Still, the raw water that was used for the treatment plant was demonstrated to have the coliform type bacteria present, and the finished water that the treatment plant produced was found to have these bacteria absent. As this update is being written, then, pure, safe water is being made and distributed at Buen Pastor. The treatment plant had been ready to produce water for three years. Last year we produced the first 500 gallons of pure, safe water with this facility, but that 500 gallons were never distributed. Finally, the water that we produced on March 6, 2008 is actually being used by the folks who so much need it. The progress may be slow, but we do see progress.

One of the home water purifier systems that was provided to the community of Gautier found its way into the hands of Father Vicente. Father Vicente is a Dominican Episcopal priest from the southeastern city of La Romana. He could see the potential that home water treatment could have, and he had a very good friend in the La Romana municipal water department. Father Vicente took this home water purification system to his friend, Sr. Martinez, who brought the home water purifier to his water quality laboratory. Sr. Martinez very much liked what he saw and feels that it may be possible to start a Dominican government program to distribute these purifiers to poor Dominican people. He wants me to help him to develop such a program. It was hard for me to find time to meet with Sr. Martinez, but our brief encounter has the potential to be the beginning of a very fruitful relationship. Sr. Martinez has graciously invited me to use his water quality laboratory any time that I am in the Dominican Republic - in addition to his invitation for us to work together on a government program for home water treatment. Now that I have a good contact with a Dominican water treatment professional, I will be working from home to strengthen our relationship via correspondence.

Another of the home water purifier systems found its way to Buen Pastor. There is a need for home water treatment at Buen Pastor in spite of the availability of water treatment plant-produced safe water at this site. The folks at Buen Pastor now also want to try the home water purifiers in order to meet this need. There was initially a little hesitation because it was felt that the home water treatment might compete with the water treatment plant product. Eventually, the idea that it was more important to provide adequate safe water by any means won out over the worry about the idea of competition.



Prevention at the Buen Pastor site: pure water is for sale, and vaccinations are available at the clinic.



The Buen Pastor water treatment plant staff, Andy and Edgar, measure chlorine concentration.

The new water treatment plant project for the La Esperanza Episcopal Church complex (church, school, clinic conference center, and rehabilitation center) has been put on hold because current construction of a new aqueduct may supply the church with a new, better source of water. In the meantime, Father Sandino, at this site, also wants to investigate the use of home water purification. I am very pleased to see that not only is the home water purification program growing steadily at Gautier, but it is spreading to Buen Pastor, and to La Esperanza, and perhaps even to a government program.

I see, as the medical team also sees, so much to be done. The need is so great that our efforts seem like tiny drops in an immense bucket. Ah, but at least these drops are pure drops, and from that we can derive a lot of satisfaction. Please, let me thank all of you for your support. Whether we prescribe medicine or prevention in the form of pure, safe water, we cannot do it without the help and generosity of the church members; the philanthropy of the community; and the devotion of the mission team members, who manage to extend themselves beyond all expectations time after time. Again, THANK YOU ALL!

Sincerely, Paul Gutmann

Invitation

The 2008 medical mission team included physicians, physicians' assistants, a nurse practitioner, nurses, a pharmacist, translators and generalist helpers.

The prayer team included deacons and lay people - priests are welcome.

The prescribing prevention team consisted of one lonely water treatment professional supported by the entire medical team.

If you have any remotely related skills or simply feel the call to help improve the lives of the needy in the

Dominican Republic, you will be welcome to join the 2009 mission trip.

Please contact Robin Baxter, R.N.

24 Baxter Way

Lake Placid, NY 12946

Phone: 518-523-9472

E-mail: robenmac30@yahoo.com

Information

For information about the Prescribing Prevention Project, please contact Paul Gutmann

349 Averyville Lane

Lake Placid, NY 12946

Phone: 518-523-9077

E-mail: gutmannpaul@yahoo.com

Donations

Donations will be gratefully received at

St. Eustace Episcopal Church

(Safe Potable Water Fund)

P.O. Box 1374

2450 Main Street

Lake Placid, NY 12946

Phone: 518-523-2564

E-mail: steustace@adelphia.net

Note that every home water purification unit costs only \$40.00 (including shipping) delivered to a family in need in the Dominican Republic. In 2007, 200 such units were purchased and delivered. All funds donated to the Safe Potable Water Fund are used to buy these units. All travel as well as all food and lodging expenses are the private responsibility of each team member. All fundraising is completely supported by volunteer efforts. Thus, all donated funds directly benefit people in need.

