



## Greetings!

Last October, Project Helping Hands partnered with Chamberlain College of Nursing to send a team of volunteers to the Puerto Plata province in the Dominican Republic. Based in Tubagua, the team spent each day trekking out to remote rural areas of the region, including Yaroa Abajo and the Hatitian "Batey" of Munoz. While Puerto Plata is itself a bustling port and famous resort city, these outlying communities remain quite poor and in need of regular support from organizations like ours.

Our mission in the D.R., as they often do, focused on providing community health education and care in under-served rural areas. What our team quickly found, however, was that these regions were not quite as under-served as they had expected. In the education sessions, children easily parroted accurate information based on sessions they'd attended in the past.



Evidently, the sustained efforts of PHH and other organizations like it are beginning to have a lasting effect in this area. Even so, the team expected to break new ground and, instead, found themselves engaged in something more like "maintenance." Many of the members of the team began to feel this discouraged-as though their support was somehow not needed. In their interactions with local patients, however, their attitude quickly changed.

The team learned quickly that the trip was less about blazing exciting new



trails or seeing huge numbers of people and more about spending valuable relational time with the patients they came to serve. While the former may look good on a postcard or a resume, the latter is where the real health care happens. In visiting with people in their homes or giving them extra time in the

clinic, our volunteers learned an invaluable lesson in what it means to care for patients as holistic human beings.

One day, the team felt pressure from local volunteers to ramp up their patient volume. As a team of consummate professionals, however, our volunteers resisted that pressure. Instead, they took the time needed to provide the best care possible. Eventually, a young girl showed up in the clinic-the niece of one of the overzealous local coordinators-and was given the slow, methodical treatment she needed. She ended up having a severe illness which would've completely been missed had our providers rushed her through the process.

It's easy to look at one of these trips and to focus on numbers: we need to teach so many sessions, run so many clinics, and see so many patients during our limited time. What our team learned, however, was that the most meaningful impact they could make was in slowing down and taking the time to build relationships with locals-to see them as human beings and to offer them the dignity of a warm smile and a meaningful conversation.


That's where the real health care happened.

### **Stats**

PHH's October '16 Dominican Republic team consisted of 12 nursing students from Chamberlain, as well as 2 faculty and 2 alumni. A different PHH team will return to the Dominican Republic in June.



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