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SUCCESS STORY

Access to Tuberculosis Treatment and Quality Care Saves Children's Lives in Haiti

Nahomie's Story



Photo: USAID/Suzanne Ross

Five-year old Nahomie is one of 23 children receiving tuberculosis treatment in the children's ward at Grace Children's Hospital in Delmas, an impoverished community on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

“When she first came to the ward, and for about two weeks, Nahomie was malnourished and could not move from her hospital bed,” says the doctor on duty. “Now she’s healthy again.”

Nahomie runs around like a typical 5-year old. Her chocolate-colored eyes reveal a curious child who is interested in everything going on around her. It's hard to believe that not too long ago she was lying in a hospital bed in critical condition.

She is one of 23 children receiving medicines to cure tuberculosis (TB) at the TB ward for children at Grace Children's Hospital in Delmas, a poor neighborhood just outside of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. The hospital is managed by International Child Care (ICC), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) supported by USAID that is strengthening DOTS (directly observed treatment, short course) TB therapy across the island in collaboration with the Haitian government.

Experts estimate that in 2005 there were nearly 33,000 cases of active pulmonary TB in Haiti, even after USAID's network of implementing partners successfully treated more than 17,000 cases in the last five years.

Poverty, lack of education, and limited access to health care contribute to Haiti's ranking as the country with the highest rate of new TB cases (incidence) in all of Latin America and the Caribbean. TB ranks as the ninth leading cause of death in Haiti.

Besides TB treatment and care, ICC also provides services in reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. It is part of the private network of NGOs and faith-based organizations working through USAID to offer an integrated package of health care services to more than 3 million Haitians.

Each month, ICC takes on average 30 to 40 children infected with TB or co-infected with both HIV and TB. Some have been brought in by their families and others by health care providers whose work is supported by USAID.

Nahomie's relatives brought her to Grace Children's Hospital after visiting many medical centers and not seeing any improvement in her health. Nahomie lives with her father and some relatives in Bicentenaire, a Port-au-Prince slum; her mother has passed away.

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again," she adds, smiling as she watches Nahomie run around the room. She has gained six pounds in one month.

The 5-year old has been on TB drugs since June 2006. She takes three pills each day. The dosage of pills given to children depends on the child's age and weight. To be fully cured, children infected with TB must follow a treatment regimen lasting eight months. The first 60 days of treatment is the intensive phase, and a hospital stay is often required to ensure adherence to the treatment and to monitor for any adverse reactions to the medicines.

The commitment of Grace Children's Hospital medical staff is apparent. Despite the challenge of a lack of pediatric formulations for TB drugs, the staff carefully adjust the adult formulations that they have. Doctors and nurses monitor the children carefully, and the children receive daily meals and have a dedicated teacher who makes sure they continue their lessons even while they are in the hospital. Through the TB treatment and care program, children like Nahomie have found a caring family, and they can expect to resume their lives as normal energetic children again soon.