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Monetary donations sought to help with Haiti medical trip

By MICKEY POWELL The Winchester Star

Dec 15, 2018

WINCHESTER — A group of area health care providers is seeking donations to buy medicines and supplies for an upcoming trip to help impoverished patients in Haiti.

“Team Dabinett,” led by Winchester gynecologist Dr. Laura Dabinett, travels to the Caribbean nation twice a year to provide free gynecological and general surgical care to those who cannot afford it. The team currently consists of two gynecologists, a general surgeon, three anesthesiologists and 15 support workers, including a nurse practitioner, nurses and operating room technicians. Two medical students from Georgetown University will accompany the team during its trip Jan. 5-12.

The team provides medical services at a clinic in Jacmel that is run by the Community Coalition for Haiti, a nonprofit organization based in Vienna, Virginia.

“We’re one of 12-14 medical teams that go to that city” and work at the clinic on a rotating basis, Dabinett said in a phone interview.

Dabinett mentioned that Jacmel was one of the communities affected by an earthquake that heavily damaged much of Haiti in 2010. Poverty has long been a major problem there, and damages sustained during the quake have made it worse, according to Dabinett.

Haiti’s medical standards are far behind most places in the western world, and most medical facilities are in and near the capital, Port-au-Prince, Dabinett said. As a result, most people across the country — including the Jacmel area — lack access to quality care and postpone seeking it when they get sick, worsening their conditions over time, she said.

Typically on trips to Haiti, the team provides treatments to between 400 and 500 patients, with 40-50 of them requiring surgery, she said.

Because of overall poor health among Haitians, the team treats a wide variety of medical problems. With health standards being much higher in the United States, Dabinett estimated that it would take her 10 years to see the variety of gynecological problems in Winchester that she usually sees in seven days in Jackmel.

That makes the trips significant learning opportunities for medical students, she pointed out.

To raise money to buy medicines and supplies for the January trip, Team Dabinett is holding a raffle. For \$5 per ticket, or \$20 for five tickets, people have an opportunity to win restaurant gift cards, a hotel stay, a photography session and/or a sailing trip to the Chesapeake Bay, all donated by area residents and businesses. Additional details about the raffle are online at WinchesterHelpingHaiti.org or the team's Facebook page.

Dabinett said she returns to Haiti each year to help the sick because the people are so welcoming and appreciative.

Despite their poverty, she said, "they are people who have nothing but faith (that things will get better for them) and are so hopeful about their future."

Personally, "I get more out of it than I give to them," she surmised. Being able to help them "fills my cup" with joy.

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