In winter 2008, Kimberly Morgan ’08 was looking forward to graduating from Salisbury University in the spring with a degree in nursing and moving on to the next step in her professional life. While she was combing over job opportunities, two really stuck out: Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and Duke University Hospital (DUH) in Durham, NC. Both would be great opportunities to practice nursing, but what Morgan really wanted was an opportunity to grow. With that thought in mind, Morgan accepted an offer from DUH’s Emergency Department where she would be given opportunities to grow in ways she never expected.

Morgan worked in the Emergency Department for four and half years. During that time, she did everything from triage to trauma to pediatrics to psychiatric nursing. Her department averaged approximately 200 patients a day. The patient variety and impressive workload ultimately prepared her for a life-changing experience when Haiti suffered a catastrophic earthquake in January 2010.

After the earthquake, many of Morgan’s coworkers took it upon themselves to help out. Morgan attempted to go with the first Duke Emergency Response Team, but, due to passport issues, she was unable to do so. When the second response team was formed, Morgan was given just five days’ notice before their departure date. With a rushed passport in hand and supplies purchased, Morgan was ready to respond.

When the plane with the second team of responders from DUH landed in Port-au-Prince, it was immediately apparent why they were there. On one side of the plane the team saw an airport crumbling before their very eyes, flanked on the other side by an enormous military plane preparing to take off with armed personnel bringing new supplies and aid. The team exited the plane and walked down the runway past groups of military personnel and into a makeshift customs tent. After getting through customs, their security detail gave very specific instructions to the response team: “Take only what you can carry and keep moving forward to the van. Do not stop for any reason. We will bring the rest of your bags and supplies.” Morgan could see the devastation through makeshift blinds as they prepared to walk out into a sea of people. She took a few steps outside the tent and a little boy grabbed her wrist. He said that his sister had died in the earthquake and asked if she had anything she could give him. In a flash, one of the security officers intervened and Morgan thought, “What on earth did I get myself into?”

The group’s first task was to assist the L’Hôpital de l’Université d’État, also home to a nursing school, that was virtually destroyed by the earthquake. Nearly 100 nurses perished during the devastation, and the hospital was forced to use tents because of the massive damage to the hospital building structure.

From there, the team went to deliver a tent and supplies to a family whose relatives lived in the Durham area near DUH. They had not been able to contact their loved ones since the earthquake. As the team made their way to the family’s home, they could see tents and shantytowns being constructed out of salvaged materials. The rainy season was coming soon, so building new shelters and finding safe drinking water was of paramount concern. The team delivered the tent successfully, and it was on to a hospital in Cange.

**Zanmi Lasante**

Partners In Health (PIH) operates a hospital in Cange called Zanmi Lasante (ZL), located in the central plateau of Haiti. The main route to ZL is an unpaved road that winds through mountainsides, surround by a man-made lake that feeds into a dam built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and decorated with homes and small villages.

The roads en route to ZL were often nothing more than narrow dirt paths, and the team regularly encountered landslides and vans full of citizens. Because of the conditions, the car with the loudest horn often won.

The team arrived at the hospital the next morning. ZL is an entire compound with multiple buildings that house a school, a church,
a woman’s unit, medical unit, surgical unit, pediatrics, emergency department, operating room and two homes. The church was converted into an overflow hospital due to the number of patients who came over from Port-au-Prince, and they hired and trained Haitian citizens to be nurses and physicians, as well as global health interns through the PIH foundation.

When dealing with patients, determining their age and other important information was often very difficult. Due to the lack of literacy, the ages of many Haitians are simply chronicled by which American president they were born under due to the lack of birth certificates. If the president was unknown, they are merely listed as “old.”

Morgan found out how truly resilient the Haitian people are while she was at ZL. Family members of the patients would stay with them at all times, cooking for them and sleeping outside for days on end in solidarity.

Multiple patients had to have open-reductions with external fixators after crush injuries from the quake. Many had pins with stabilization rods that required pin-care dressing changes. Some patients also required skin grafting due to the fractures/crush injuries being compound (open) fractures. Due to the external fixators, several patients experienced bone infections (osteomyelitis) that would ultimately result in amputation if antibiotics were not effective. Volunteers often had to work fast.

One day, as the team was making their rounds, a child thought he felt another earthquake. He said something out loud, causing all of the kids to evacuate the school in a flurry of panic. Meanwhile, all of the patients in the church next door also believed another earthquake had begun and attempted to get out of the church despite their injuries. Patients were trying to run out of the building on crushed limbs while families dragged others out on mattresses. It was a harrowing firsthand look at the post-traumatic stress the patients were experiencing.

As the children were running out, the team stopped them and tried to calm them down. Before long, several of the kids formed a circle and started dancing, soothing the rest of the crowd. The team used face paint to make smiley faces on the children’s limbs and casts, and played games until they were assured everyone had been taken care of.

After eight days at ZL, the team headed back to the Port-au-Prince airport to return home. For many members of the team – especially Morgan – they received much more from the Haitian people than the services they provided.

“Before I went on this trip I was getting a little burned out and numb to the work I was doing,” she said. “This experience really gave me an appreciation for what I learned at SU and at DUH. I am now reverting back to my Salisbury days and becoming more patient-centered than ever. The positive outlook that the Haitians exhibited has made me a better professional and a better person.”

Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o13h38Ko to view video about the amputees who received prosthetics from Morgan’s team, or www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEfahf7GJu to see the hospital conditions in Port-au-Prince. To learn more about Partners in Health, visit www.pih.org.