

## Horizon physicians spend week at Haiti clinic



*Dr. Marci Wilson, above, was one of a number of Horizon Family Medicine physicians who travelled to Haiti last month.*

By [Stuart Fullarton - Sylvan Lake News](#)

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A group of physicians from Horizon Family Medicine in Sylvan Lake and Red Deer are back from a trip to Haiti, where they spent a week last month providing medical care to locals.

According to Horizon business manager Martin Penninga, the trip was not only extremely productive — he estimates between 350 and 400 patients were treated — but also eye opening for those who travelled there.

“For the group, there’s the opportunity to help patients down there, but it also is very impacting to the group that goes down, to come back and realize the wealth that we have and the easy access to health care, roads that are paved, and all those things that you never think about until you see another side of the world,” he said.

Four physicians from Horizon’s two clinics in Sylvan Lake and Red Deer were joined by a support team of seven during their one-week stay in Grand-Goâve.

They set up at a clinic operated by Haiti ARISE, a faith-based humanitarian organization, and spent a full week treating patients who may otherwise not have been able to access health care.

“The government just does not have funds in order to set up a proper health care system, and so many Haitian patients obviously don’t have access to see a doctor,” said Penninga. “Even if they did on a limited capacity, they can’t afford to see a physician or go to a hospital. There’s definitely a huge, huge gap between health care need and health care providers.”

He added that some patients walked for half a day and over mountains just to get the clinic.

Patients ranged in age, from young children to elderly folk.

Penninga felt the biggest challenge for the doctors was determining where to begin with the patients — some had no medical history or had never seen a physician before. Others wouldn’t be able to afford to go for follow-up tests or x-rays, he said.

“The need was so great, it was very difficult.”

The trip to Haiti ARISE was the first for Horizon, which has been supporting the clinic financially since last year.

Horizon’s sponsorship, along with funding from other clinics and organizations, allows the ARISE clinic to pay for physicians to man the clinic on a part-time basis. Medical teams from other clinics also visit at various times throughout the year.

Although not yet confirmed, Penninga said he’s hoping that Horizon can send another team to the clinic in the future. A potential tentative date of 2015 has been targeted, and interest has already been expressed from physicians willing to partake.

“There’s definitely a passion for overseas medical work, especially here in the Red Deer area,” he said. “It’s a very affluent area. We have easy access to health care, and looking around the world, that’s not always the case, and so we want to be able to reach out as we can.”

Along with Penninga, the travelling group included Dr. Raymond Comeau, Dr. Mandy Hyde and her husband Daryl, Dr. Chauntille Munchinsky and her husband Justin, Dr. Marci Wilson and her husband Dan, and Denise Hubert.