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UCSD Laboratory Hosts Haitian Doctor to Train in Infectious Disease Microbiology

San Diego, CA. January 13, 2011. Young physician, Dr. Evald Chery, who treats HIV/ AIDS patients in Haiti will be arriving at San Diego today to train in infectious disease (ID) microbiology as part of the University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI) through the beginning of July.

Dr. Chery specializes in HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, and internal medicine. During his trip to the United States, he will undergo six months of broad and extensive training in microbiology, including bacteriology, parasitology, and virology, with special attention to diseases specific to Haiti. His training will be facilitated by Dr. Sanjay Mehta and the Infectious Disease (ID) Division at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). Upon his return to Haiti, Dr. Chery will setup and teach at his own microbiology lab in Haiti's University and Educational Hospital (HUEH). His core areas of focus include laboratory techniques, epidemiology of infectious diseases, clinical knowledge, and teaching techniques.

Dr. Chery hopes to "develop a good background in microbiology; I want to improve my clinical capacity as well as teach medical students such techniques."

What is notable about Dr. Chery's trip is the generous support of the San Diego community. Dr. Mehta has designed a training program specifically for Dr. Chery. The UCSD microbiology lab has offered to pay all direct training costs, and the Nash family, a UCHI affiliate, has offered to be his host family in America,

providing him a home for the duration of the trip. The UCSD Chancellor's office is also welcoming him with open arms, offering Dr. Chery a living stipend to subsidize his costs of living while training.

Dr. Chery says, "I have an advantage to come here; I will do whatever I can on return to share the skills I acquire because in Haiti we face a lot of infectious diseases (think about cholera, HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria). My colleagues and trainees can take care of these pathologies easily and to alleviate suffering."

UCHI plans for this mentorship and training program to be the first of many. Pending successful completion of the microbiology training program with Dr. Chery, UCHI will arrange for future training in Haiti with UC physicians at HUEH and other Haitian hospitals, with the goal of creating a bilateral mentorship program across countries, bringing Haitian and American physicians together to share medical knowledge, research methodology, and best practices.

Dr. Mehta says, "I hope that once the microbiology lab is up and running, we will be able to collaborate with the physicians at HUEH on research projects involving new diagnostic tools and methods."

The microbiology training program is one of many development projects started by the University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI). UCHI is a student-led organization founded in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 Haitian earthquake. UCHI utilizes resources across all 10 UC campuses to help Haiti strengthen their educational system and rebuild their community development. This particular program came to fruition when Dr. Ben-Artiz, the Executive Director at UCHI and a physician at UCLA, reached out to his colleagues about the initiative. Dr. Mehta jumped at the opportunity to participate.

"After the initial conference set up by UCHI [in March 2010], I learned that one of the needs of the HUEH hospital was the

reestablishment of a microbiology lab. As an Assistant Microbiology Lab Director at UCSD, I thought I might be able to leverage my knowledge, and position to help train a physician to run the new microbiology lab,” Dr. Mehta says.

Dr. Mehta has a background in infectious diseases, especially in HIV and tropical parasitology, and has always been interested in development work. UCHI offered him the unique opportunity to share his scientific skills and utilize his passion for giving back in a tangible way.

Dr Mehta says, “Haiti has suffered an incredibly unfortunate series of events. The post- apocalyptic images after the earthquake are etched in my mind. I hoped to spend some time working in Haiti after the earthquake, but things did not work out. Thus, when I heard about UCHI I was excited to get involved. I am especially pleased that the focus of the program is to build the capacity of Haitians to handle their nation’s issues.”

For questions, additional information, supplementary quotes, and more, contact: Taylor Schooley University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI) Telephone Number: 1-619-917-4459

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About UCHI

The University of California Haiti Initiative (UCHI) is a student-led initiative formed in 2010 following the disastrous Haitian earthquake. UCHI features a unique combination of various academic disciplines working across 10 UC campuses in the UC system, with the support of UC faculty and administration, to work collaboratively with local Haitian organizations to improve higher education and increase sustainable development.

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