

Night Watch: Stats say that one out of every five babies in Haiti will not live to be five years old and one out of seventeen mothers will die at childbirth. In the clinic, histories commonly listed any mother of 5 or 6 to have had 2 babies die at birth or shortly after, and if they had 4 children, they had at least one dead child. It is common to see a majority of small tombs in cemeteries.

The last few days I've spent considerable time with the family of the baby Rose, I welcomed to the world over two weeks ago. She was beautiful but very small, with a good sucking response. I could not put her to nurse right away as the manman was having some significant blood pressure problems. In the evening she did begin to nurse and then I got busy with the team.

During the week the papa, Reynaud, said things were going well except she had an "inny" belly button rather than an "outtie" as most children have here. I had not cut the cord quite as long as midwives do, which usually results in a small umbilical hernia that closes when they are older.

After the team left I visited Rose and was concerned the baby did not seem strong and had not gained any weight. Manman said she would not nurse well and cried when she tried. There was plenty of breast milk yet the baby was taking sweet water from an old baby bottle. I encouraged nursing and checked the mouth and sucking reflex which was weak.

Today the baby was too weak to nurse and we tried to arrange transfer to the clinic at Port a Raket. The weather became threatening and I feared getting the baby wet so made some rehydration solution and chose to send them early tomorrow. They will nurse her frequently and top it off with the solution in a bottle.

Coming home I took a tiny detour, hiding on the steps of the church with my head on my knees deciding to think or not. Eventually I looked up at two local women quietly standing by. One asked if I was crying for "pititla" then told me I did not have to cry and gently guided me home. I was embarrassed as there are few tears on La Gonave.

Filling Joe in on plans for the morning, a local lady came to the door with her sister and baby from Grand Vide. This 5 week old baby was still at birth weight of about 5 lbs, dehydrated and too weak to nurse. Now two pitit las are ready to go by boat early tomorrow to the clinic 6 miles east. I'm praying they will make it through the night and the rain will end by morning.

Both of these babies are number 5 and both mothers admit they did not eat well during this pregnancy and have little food now. The mothers both seem depressed and exhausted and say the baby "is evil" ...meaning something I don't understand. I have prayed with them and assured them they are good mamas but...I'm not a neo-natal nurse and I don't like the statistics.

Perhaps the answer to questions I ask of women who have babies who died shortly after birth is that small, undernourished infants with tired mamas are just too weak to thrive.

Pastor Shirley, sousafilip, Haiti, May 16th 2009 <http://gbgmlagonave.blogspot.com>