

As certified nurse-midwife Annie Heath walks through security at BDL's Terminal A, she is both directed and visionary. Following the same routine since 2003, she buys a steaming cup of hot chocolate from La Vazza, then affords herself a few minutes to collect her thoughts. She will soon speak to her fellow travelers, all medical personnel on the Continental Airlines' flight, first landing in EWR and then on to the Dominican Republic, to brief them on the following week's schedule. They will travel to Santiago to a busy, impoverished hospital in an effort to raise the quality of care given to its young mothers and babies. It is a cause that this mother of five is passionate about. Her children, ages 26, 23, 18 and 10 year old twins, understand Annie's determination and know their mom is following a course that will make the world a better place. Annie always prepares them for these trips, by carefully pouring over the map of her destination country and reviewing her schedule. She sorely wishes she had the means to bring her children with her, but, as a single mother, Annie must use her resources sparingly and international airline tickets are costly. Flights to the Dominican Republic for these volunteer missions are not covered under organizational expenses so Annie and her colleagues fund their own transportation without complaint or question. It's part of their mission.

After arriving at the gate, Annie sips her hot chocolate while speaking with her colleagues. They listen attentively as she describes the upcoming week at Hôpital San Vicente de Paul. There are scheduled educational offerings to present as well as on site 24 hour a day clinical support assisting the personnel there. Annie's organization was developed specifically to decrease the extraordinarily high rate of infant and maternal death in the Dominican Republic where a newborn baby is

likely to die at ten times the rate in the United States. Its name, Proyecto Adames, hails from the Director of Nursing at Hôpital San Vicente de Paul, whose initial connection with Annie was made after a presentation during a Health Care Symposium at the University of Puerto Rico. Senora Adames asked for help and Annie took this challenge on full force. She traveled to the hospital and evaluated the practice there. It was clear to this Philadelphia native that much work needed to be done to help these dedicated caregivers improve their practice. A plan was formulated and she turned to her midwife, nurse and physician colleagues for help to establish a program with a dual purpose, to improve the outcome of childbirth while raising the level of medical expertise. By implementing a progressive educational track with a paralleled clinical support system, evidence based medicine now flourishes. The nurses at Hôpital San Vicente de Paul are eager students and changes in practice has brought immediate results with a drastic reduction in childbirth complications. But Annie's vision includes broader goals. Bringing in resources from the Hartford/Springfield corridor, a plan for facility improvement is underway. Anyone with a willingness to volunteer is welcomed and there are over 100 participants from all over the United States involved thus far. By Annie's measure, everyone has something to offer whether it is a service, expertise to share, funding, or simply spreading the word. Using a grassroots model and little budget, Proyecto Adames has been able to gather supplies from companies such as Costco as well as unused medical supplies from Baystate Medical Center and Mercy Hospital in Springfield, MA where Annie has her private midwifery practice. "Hopefully the duffle bags will make it, " she says as she thinks of the supplies carefully packed in two bags. Annie is sure to include her slideshow and curriculum in her carryon

bag as she and her team will begin teaching their students shortly after landing.

Since she was a young woman, Annie has sought out opportunities to help others and uses these experiences to help Proyecto Adames flourish. Always determined to reach her goals, Annie has done whatever it takes to be successful, from learning Spanish to becoming a registered nurse and seeking a graduate degree in midwifery. She has worked in inner cities as well as cared for wealthy mothers from the suburbs, never deviating from her standard of care. She has taught both nursing and midwifery and remains humble. Annie's intense drive to help others is clearly apparent and she offers no pretense or subtlety. She will tell you what she needs and ask how you can help.

Before she lands in EWR, Annie closes her eyes and tries to nap as she is well aware that once she arrives in the Dominican Republic, sleep will be a luxury. She is still comfortable in her dress slacks but has worn several layers of tops so she can easily switch to suit the tropical climate. There is no air conditioning at Hôpital San Vicente de Paul and, in fact, no electricity. A generator is being considered for the new budget but for now, biking helmets with lights are used when babies are born at night. The tourists enjoying their luxurious accommodations at the nearby seaside resorts would be dismayed to know this local hospital does not have running water during most of the day. Proyecto Adames has engineers volunteering their time to develop rainwater collection systems and, although to date none has worked effectively, there are great strides being made in the last 6 months. "I always pack several bottles of waterless antibacterial gel" says Annie. "It's an absolute necessity."

Proyecto Adames results seem incredible. Within a short time span, the death rate of newborn babies at Hôpital de San Vicente de Paul has dropped to a level comparable to that in the Hartford/Springfield area. This is due directly to practice and facility improvements led by Proyecto Adames. The World Health Organization has declared a worldwide initiative to decrease the rate of newborn deaths and has partnered with the Proyecto Adames model to carry this out.

Making this commitment has not been easy for Annie but she, along with her Proyecto Adames colleagues, have taken the idea of empowerment and sharing to the highest of levels. With Proyecto Adames as a model, Annie for a worldwide practice change, improving conditions in all corners of our planet. "My life is truly enriched by this. I have been so fortunate to have such a strong supportive family here, I have to share with others."

Yes, leaving from Terminal A at BDL, grabbing her cup of hot chocolate and hopping on the Continental Airlines' flight, Annie Heath CNM truly connects an international world of caring, sharing and expertise. We are proud to include her in the BDL community.

For more information on Proyecto Adames or to offer support or services, please visit www.proyectoadames.org.