



# Lightening the Load

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**Examining one emaciated horse** after another in a remote Haitian village, Brooke Vransy finally came across a good-looking mule belonging to an elderly man. “You could tell from his ... interaction with his mule that it was his pride and joy,” says Vransy, director of emergency services at Days End Farm Horse Rescue in Woodbine, Md.

During the three-day clinic in February, Vransy and a team of Humane Society International equine specialists evaluated more than 200 working horses, donkeys, mules, and burros. The health of the elderly man’s mule would stand out as the exception: In this impoverished country where veterinary care is nearly nonexistent, most of the animals suffered from malnutrition, intestinal parasites, and chronic saddle sores filled with pus and maggots.

From sunrise to sundown, the American

team supervised and instructed 20 Haitian veterinarians as they administered treatment. Relied on for transporting goods to market, the equines are essential to rural livelihoods, and villagers listened closely as Vransy showed how to modify and pad pack saddles to allow open wounds to heal.

Part of the self-empowerment program HSI established after the country’s 2010 earthquake, the clinics were also an educational opportunity for the Haitian veterinarians, most of whom had never halted a horse or lifted a hoof. Their new skills will greatly improve the lives of people and animals in their home regions. Says Vransy, “Even if it’s just 10 horses in their locale that they’re treating once a week, imagine the number of people they can educate in one year.”



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Part of a team of HSI equine specialists, Brooke Vraný helps Haitian vets examine a horse (1). Most of the vets had no previous hands-on experience with equines, who work seven days a week hauling burdens over long distances in Haiti (2, 3). The HSI team spent three days traveling by bus to hold clinics in remote Central Plateau market towns (4).



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Residents allowed the team to set up treatment stations in their yards (5). At one such station, American veterinarian Javier Donatelli supervises a horse's dental care (6). In Mirebalais, owners waited for hours to have their animals seen (7). Chronic saddle sores are ubiquitous in Haiti; the only treatment owners knew was to cover them with ashes.