Summary
● In May of 2022, four University of Maine students traveled to Senegal with Partners for World Health, a non-profit out of Portland, Maine. Students helped 50 pregnant Senegalese women make a plan for their pregnancy while providing them with health education and sterile birthing kit supplies and providing primary care services to 250 Senegalese citizens.

Project Description
● The University of Maine Partners for World Health chapter is the oldest college club chapter of the Maine-based 501(c)3 non-profit. In 2019, former UMaine PWH club members participated in a similar mission to Senegal and participated in the Project 10,000 initiative, providing knowledge and supplies to pregnant mothers to aid in the birth of a healthy baby. When PWH announced an end to its three-year pause on the Medical Missions program due to COVID-19, our students were eager to help contribute to this effort of lowering Senegal's maternal and infant mortality rates. This May, our students returned to Senegal with other Partners for World Health volunteers and expanded this effort, pairing Project 10,000 with Project Plan Ahead, helping these women make the best plan possible for their pregnancy and delivery. In Senegal, our students were responsible for interviewing patients and conducting patient intake as well as assisting trained nurses and doctors in education and treatment efforts.
● Senegal was chosen as the host site for three main reasons. First, Senegal demonstrates a need for intervention in infant and maternal mortality rates. Additionally, PWH has established strong relationships with local professionals who were able to help organize the logistics for such a Medical Mission. And third, PWHs medical mission timeline coincided with students' summer break, a season of good weather, and followed-up on a medical supplies shipment sent earlier that May. PWH routinely sends medical supplies shipments to partnering countries and does its best to follow up with a medical mission such as this one.
● Our volunteers planned to work with nearly 500 expecting mothers during our twelve days in Senegal. We ended up working with only 50. This result was due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic which disrupted the routine annual visits by PWH volunteers that many Senegalese women relied on. When PWH returned in May for the first time in three years, we did not have lines of expecting mothers waiting for us as we had anticipated due to many forgetting about this service in that time. To adapt, we asked our local contacts to go out and recruit expecting mothers and folks in need of medical care. Given that injured people were more abundant than pregnant women, we were able to recruit and use the medical supplies, medications, and eyeglasses we had brought to treat 250 Senegalese people for injuries ranging from infections to hypertension or chronic stomach aches to poor eyesight.
● In addition to being awarded a Projects for Peace grant, funds were also gathered from the routine resale of medical supplies to third-party resellers which—with the help of PWH and medical supplies donations—contributed to our ability to attend the medical mission.
● Partners for World Health will return to Senegal in May of 2023 to follow up on their past years’ work to continue providing health education, supplies, and intervention to help healthy mothers
birth healthy babies. UMaine students could be used similarly in the future as assistants to nurses and doctors in this effort just as we did this year.

**Reflection**

- Peace can be defined as a time free of civil disruption, in which people can live their lives freely without undue hardship.
- In the short term, we helped contribute to the peace by providing individuals with much-needed healthcare and health education. This peace came in the form of creating better living situations and improved qualities of life for mothers, tailors, fishermen, housewives, shop owners, young soccer players, school children, young babies, and all other patients we helped. We helped Senegalese people spread peace by providing them with the necessary information on when and how to seek healthcare in their country, arming themselves and others with the ability to spread health education. Further, we helped ensure healthy lives for future Senegalese children by providing their mothers with the knowledge to understand their pregnancy and giving them the ability to share that knowledge with others.
- The issue of unsafe pregnancy and childbirth practices in countries throughout the world exists for numerous reasons. Many of these stem from improper health education on behalf of midwives and expecting mothers. Almost every expecting mother we interviewed did not know when to seek care during pregnancy and was unaware of what pregnancy experiences were normal and what were abnormal complications. Other barriers to healthy childbirth include a lack of supplies, inadequate transportation, and extreme poverty. These were all evident in Senegal. Further, expecting mothers expressed that they did not trust doctors or midwives to give them adequate care. Even if they did, they normally could not afford to seek care. Much of this distrust was due to a midwife taking advantage of a mother by taking her birthing supplies, paying little attention to the mother, or simply not knowing how to respond to various painful complications. For these reasons and more, health education, supplies, and planning were integral to teaching expecting mothers how to birth a healthy baby while keeping themselves healthy too.
- This medical mission trip to Senegal changed the way we think about the world around us. Our students had never experienced the levels of poverty that we saw through each patient we interacted with. These images, stories, and relationships will shape our view of the world, work, and relationships for the rest of our lives. More surprisingly, we realized just how much we had taken our education for granted in the United States and Canada. Many people do not have the same opportunities we do to learn. This manifests itself not just in the school building but also in daily life. In households of many less fortunate countries such as Senegal, access to healthcare education, trade education, financial literacy, and even the ability to read are uncommon. In addition to providing tangible medical supplies, the ability to provide people with life-saving and life-changing education was something that will stick with our volunteers for years to come.

**Personal Statement**

"The most important thing I learned on this trip is the value of education as a means to a more peaceful and healthy society. This new perspective and my experiences abroad will shape the rest of my professional and interpersonal life for years to come."

- Michael Delorge

"The trip educated me in so many ways I did not know possible but I think my main takeaway has been that there is so much I can teach and learn from other people both within and outside of the US. For that reason, I want to continue doing trips like this to other countries because I feel like there are so many different cultures that can learn from each other for the better."

- Meredith Mitchell