



Optimist International Caribbean District  
Childhood Cancer Campaign 2013 - 2014



# Face of the District - Childhood Cancer Campaign

On Wednesday January 22, 2014, members of the District Childhood Cancer Campaign (CCC) Committee represented Governor Nutilia Simon and the Caribbean District at a Reception following the Annual Paediatric Cancer Conference 2014, held at the UWI Mona Visitor's Lodge.

The invitation to this post-Conference Reception was extended by the Bustamante Hospital for Children (BHC), a major stakeholder in the Jamaica childhood cancer treatment and care, and one of its partners in the effort to improve the outcome of cancer care for children, the volunteer group Jamaicans Abroad Helping Jamaicans At Home (JAHJAH) Foundation. Also in attendance were paediatric specialists from other local hospitals, a paediatric oncology team from the Columbia University Hospital, New York who has been working with Bustamante Hospital for the past 4 years as well as representatives from both the Ministry of Health (Jamaica) and the South East Region Health Authority (SERHA).

District Cancer Chair Sonia Anderson said, on learning about the invitation, that it was wonderful to know that the work that the District continues to do in Jamaica with the children's hospital was recognized by stakeholders. The recognition that we, Optimist International, received during this event was resounding.

For Caribbean Optimists who are not aware of the District's relationship with the BHC, the District Committee, through its Annual Cancer Brunch, has been working with the BHC Cancer Support Group and contributing all proceeds from the brunch to provide support to families and care partners of children with cancer. The funds are used towards transportation costs and any other provision that the families may need as they cope with their child's illness ensuring that no child misses clinic appointments. Further, individual clubs as well as the District Committee conduct projects such as "adopting" a cancer patient, donating educational items to the Learning Centre and having treats for these children whether they are on the ward or in the Outpatient Clinic taking our cue from the doctors on what to serve.

Back to the evening, from the entry of the Committee Members into Reception Hall, we were warmly welcomed by the Senior Medical Officer, Dr. Michelle-Ann Richards-Dawson. She in turn introduced us to some of the key medical professionals highlighting the fact that the Optimist International's consistent outreach programme to the BHC was vital. The atmosphere was one of genuine recognition and appreciation of our service. We basked in the acknowledgement on your behalf. It was resounding when each and every speaker mentioned our name and did so correctly, as Optimist International or Optimist Clubs, whether to thank us or to acknowledge our presence in the opening remarks. The speakers included : Dr Michelle-Ann Richards-Dawson who went into detail about our service to the hospital; Dr. Trevor A. Dixon the founder of the JAHJAH Foundation mentioned our work ;

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Committee Members 2013/2014:

Sonia Anderson – Chairperson --● Pat Brathwaite --● Avon Carty --● Louise Jackson --● Pat McLean – Past Chairperson  
--● Rose M. Medley --● Diana Morrison --● Verna Valentine



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Dr. Fenton Ferguson, the Minister of Health, acknowledged our presence and turned the spotlight on us by asking us to indicate our presence ; and Dr. Maria Luisa Sulis, of the Columbia University Hospital, New York spoke about the role we play in supporting the children.

Even though, we recognised that we may have received valuable unpaid publicity we were also privy to a first-hand report on the Jamaica Childhood Cancer Initiative. The presentations by the Minister of Health, Dr. Ferguson, and Dr. Sulis identified Childhood Cancer Awareness as a major thrust in paediatric cancer care. The doctors mentioned that persons have a mistaken belief that children and babies do not get cancer. Thus when these children are presented at the hospital they are usually very ill. Dr. Sulis also mentioned that support and funding are critical components which can determine if paediatric cancer is generally a death sentence for children in Jamaica or treatable as is the case in the United States.

As Optimists, we should all be aware that the Childhood Cancer Campaign's mission statement is, "Optimist International shall be the leading force to rid the world of childhood cancer" and the motto is, "Providing the Care ... Finding the Cure".

BHC is the only hospital for paediatric oncology in the Caribbean region and the 2012/2013 International President J.C. St. Onge visited and made an extensive tour of the facilities in May 2013.

Other notable persons present at the reception were Mr. Lyttleton Shirley the Chairman of SERHA; Dr. Peta-Gay Scott Brown of BHC; Dr. Kerice Pinkney a Fellow in Paediatric Oncology – Columbia University Hospital; and Dr. Mark Wong of the Kinston Public Hospital (KPH).

Immediate Past Chairperson Pat McLean, Rose M. Medley and Verna Valentine represented the District.

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