

Health Voluntourism

Considering working as a health worker overseas or planning a medical elective?

Volunteering overseas can be a life-changing experience for many and have a lasting positive impact on self-development. It has the potential to build soft skills, and this, with the cross cultural experience and global perspectives volunteering brings, is popular with many future employers.

You feel you have something to offer – but wait a minute

Although research has looked at the impact of volunteering on the volunteer, very little has been written about the impact of volunteering on host communities. Whether your motivation is altruism, self-enhancement or a combination of both

There are some questions you should ask yourself first ...

Who benefits?

Me? The host community? Someone else?

Sustainable or “band-aid”?

What are the positive and negative, short and long-term impacts, on the community?

Why me?

How does this work fit in with the local health system, community resource needs and local expectations? Do they want me? Do they need me? Will I be creating dependency? Will my presence be creating a drain on the health care system?

Can I do it?

Will I be working within my scope and level of training? Will I be able to work to my highest ethical and moral standards? Will I be doing no harm? Will I be respecting patient autonomy?



What else do I need to know?

What pre-departure training and briefing is provided? (e.g. cultural, language, work and living related). What support will be available in-country?

Are there more effective ways in which I can use my skills for this host community?

Learn more about the dilemmas of volunteering as a health worker.

Further info can be found in....

Holland, A. & Holland, J. (2011). First, Do No Harm: A Qualitative Research Documentary. Online at <https://vimeo.com/22008886>

Snyder, J. Dharamsi, S. Crooks, V. (2011). “Fly-By medical care: Conceptualizing the global and local social responsibilities of medical tourists and physician voluntourists,” *Globalization and Health* 7:6. <http://www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/7/1/6>

McLennan, S. (2014). “Medical voluntourism in Honduras: ‘Helping’ the poor?”. *Progress in Development Studies* vol. 14 no. 2 163-179. <http://pdj.sagepub.com/content/14/2/163.abstract>

Seymour B et al. Preparing Dental Students for Responsible Engagement in International programmes. *Journal of Dental Education* 2013; Vol 77, No 10: 1252 -1257.

Tourism Concern. International volunteering, filling the gaps –report 2014. www.tourismconcern.org.uk



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