



## Volunteers Around the World

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To Whom It May Concern,

Volunteers Around the World (VAW) has been in operation since May 2006. During that time we have treated tens of thousands of patients and have provided medication, education, and ongoing care in the communities we serve. It has always been the goal of VAW to provide quality and ethical care for our patients. We involve pre-medical students in our clinics and we always adhere with strict compliance to regulations published by organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). In our ongoing pursuit of outstanding care for our patients we certify the following:

- All of our physicians are licensed professionals. They are local physicians who have graduated with medical degrees and are licensed by the local medical board. Our physicians oversee and are fully responsible for every diagnosis, performing medical procedures, administering medications, and all other tasks generally reserved for medical professionals. We also obtain local permits from local government for all of our clinics.
- Medications that are administered in our clinics are purchased in the country where they are administered. We do this to ensure proper formulation of the medication for local patients, to ensure oversight from local health officials, and to comply with local law. All medications are prescribed by a licensed physician and are always distributed to the patients by a licensed physician or pharmacist.
- Our student volunteers are given adequate education on simple tasks such as taking weight, height, temperature, blood sugar, and blood pressure measurements. They perform all of these tasks always under the direct supervision of a licensed nurse or physician. Also during the consultation, physicians always verify the vitals that were taken by a student to ensure accuracy.
- In addition to clinical instruction, students are encouraged to learn local history, customs, and cultural differences. VAW expects students to approach the experience with an open mind that enables ethical and effective treatment. It is important that students always recognize that during clinic the care of patients is our foremost concern. Treat patients with the same care that you would want to be treated and recognize your limitations as a student so patient safety is always maintained.
- Students should know that opportunities to work in a regulated clinical experience within the United States is always available. However, your support to Volunteers Around the World does allow care to be given to people who would not otherwise have it available, so your sacrifice is much needed and appreciated.

I have attached a copy of a publication from AAMC that discusses the things pre-medical students should consider whenever they volunteer with an organization like Volunteers Around the World. I encourage you to read it. VAW unites with organizations like AAMC and the WHO to work towards the goal of Universal Health Care. Health care is a human right, not a privilege. No one should have to watch their loved one die because the nearest doctor is too far away, or the medications couldn't be afforded. We are working towards making health care available where we can. Hopefully it will one day be available to everyone. Come join us to make this dream a reality!

Sincerely,

**Mark Stanley**

CEO | Volunteers Around the World

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## **Guidelines for Premedical and Medical Students Providing Patient Care During Clinical Experiences Abroad**

Acquiring exposure to a variety of health-related clinical settings is a vital part of premedical and medical student preparation. Many students are now taking advantage of opportunities to gain clinical experiences abroad, where regulations governing the procedures that students can perform on patients are often less stringent and well defined than in the United States and Canada. Additionally, existing local regulations may not be uniformly or fully enforced. While many students have had beneficial experiences through involvement in patient care activities abroad, and services have been provided to people in need, the potential for harm and abuse in these situations cannot be ignored. Participation of inadequately educated and untrained students in these situations can have negative consequences including:

- **Harm done to the patient.** Everyone's goal is to always help those in need; the first step in that direction must be to avoid doing any harm. As a student, it may be difficult to know what might cause harm, so you must carefully avoid situations where there is any possibility that you might injure someone or cause other harm.
- **Physical harm to yourself.** Engaging in any clinical practice without sufficient training and protection can result in direct harm to you, as well as to the patient. Further, sponsoring organizations may not have in place plans to assist you if you contract an illness and/or are injured.
- **Legal issues with local authorities.** Even if a local health care provider is supervising your interactions with patients or says that it is acceptable for you to perform a procedure, violation of local laws may still be a punishable offense.
- **Putting acceptance to medical school and residency training programs at risk.** Many pre-medical students believe that the more in-depth clinical experience they have, the stronger their applications will be. However, taking on tasks that are beyond your training could make you look unethical, unknowledgeable about the health professions, irresponsible to admission committees, and may diminish or eliminate your chance for acceptance into medical school. Similarly, medical students who perform procedures beyond their training may negatively impact their chances of matching in residency programs.
- **The potential for being involved with a fraudulent company.** There are companies that will, for a fee, help place you in a foreign clinic. Be aware that some of these

companies are in the business of making money first, and they may not be ethically sound. Check out these companies very carefully before signing any contracts. If any agency is over-promising and suggests that you will actually practice medicine while abroad, rather than simply observe or shadow, you should have serious reservations about working with this agency.

**Premedical and Medical students considering participating in an international medical service experience should review the following:**

- The primary purpose of a student clinical experience is observation, not hands-on treatment. You are there to learn, not to treat.
- Always keep the welfare of the patient foremost in your mind, not the perceived opportunity for proving yourself. Ask yourself how you would feel if you were in the place of a patient and a person with limited skills and preparation was about to perform a procedure on you. If this thought makes you feel uncomfortable, it is probably not an appropriate task for you to be doing. Recognizing patient autonomy is one of the core values of medical ethics; it is particularly important to honor in communities with limited resources, where all patients must be given the choice whether or not to have trainees involved in their care.
- Every act of service involves the building of a cultural bridge. Students should bring knowledge of the history and culture of the community they will serve, respect for cultural differences, a listening and learning attitude, and behaviors that will enable ethical and effective service. Health care professionals in the country being served will likely have a deep understanding of local health care issues, resources and challenges. Be sensitive to the concerns of the local health care team and seek to understand the perspective of the patients you are serving.
- It is appropriate for students to provide preventive health education and to support the health care team by assisting in the provision of health treatment after receiving adequate instruction. However, students should never engage in any unsupervised activity that is considered the practice of medicine including, but not limited to: diagnosing diseases, administering narcotics, performing surgical procedures, suturing or other tasks generally reserved for the trained health professional.
- There will always be disparities in what individual students are prepared and trained to do. Some students (e.g., those with previous EMT training) will be better prepared to take on more advanced patient care than others. However, just because a peer has been able to successfully perform a particular task does not mean that you are also ready to undertake the same task. Understand and perform within your limitations.
- Students should be aware that it is not necessary to travel abroad to serve those in need. There are many opportunities to help the disadvantaged and other underserved groups in

the U.S. There are likely worthwhile volunteer opportunities in your own community, with many more around the country. Also, be mindful that while appropriate experience in other countries can be valuable and may be viewed as complementary, if you plan to practice in the U.S, it is particularly important to understand U.S. healthcare.

*Approved by the AAMC GSA Steering Committee on February 25, 2011*

Adapted with permission from policies developed at: Hendrix College, Conway, AR by Mark Sutherland, Ph.D., Professor of Biology; Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service (<http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/haas/principles/document>), and the American Dental Education Association.