



Special Considerations in the Preparation of Family Medicine Residents and Medical Students Interested in International Experiences

American Academy of Family Physicians, Commission on Education

International activities in family medicine are valued at both an individual and organizational level by the American Academy of Family Physicians. As an organization, this value is incorporated into the overall strategic plan of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Some benefits of international involvement for the individual student or resident are listed below.

Medical students and residents have ever-increasing opportunities for educational experiences in international settings as evidenced in the growing number of opportunities listed in the online database International Health Care Opportunities in Family Medicine available at www.aafp.org/cgi-bin/ihcpop.pl.

In 2005, 308 or 67% of family medicine residencies in the United States indicated the existence of an educational opportunity outside of the U.S. These programs reflect a broad range of experience and involvement with international health opportunities. Many of these institutions also provide assistance to residents or students from other programs who wish to participate in an international rotation, independent of their institution.

With an increase in opportunities, there is more demand for general guidelines to inform and support international experiences. This special considerations paper is set forth as a resource for faculty who lead groups of students or residents abroad or supervise students or residents who arrange an independent international rotation. However, this resource is also useful for the residents and students themselves as they prepare for an international experience.

Benefits of an International Health Experience

Issues of cultural sensitivity and competence in working with individuals and families from diverse cultural backgrounds are recommended components of medical school and residency curriculum. These

competencies are directly addressed through international experiences.

Many students and residents have an interest in working with underserved populations. People and agencies in international developing-world settings can benefit from student and resident rotations, if part of an ongoing and sustained program. In this way, the learners' educational experiences complement the services they provide to patients. Residents and students gain a sense of making a difference in the lives of individuals and families in these settings. It can be a true service-learning opportunity.

In addition to the opportunity to see unique diseases such as tropical infections, common diseases may be encountered in more advanced stages than are typically seen in the United States.

Educational Objectives for an International Experience

Learning goals and objectives for the experience need to be established and clearly articulated for the student or resident and participating faculty.

Potential learning goals for the resident or the student:

- To develop a broader worldview of communities with different life styles, health care systems and political systems;
- To develop an awareness of diverse psychosocial and cultural beliefs and practices, to understand differences in community structure and resources, and to observe how this affects health care delivery;
- To experience alternative approaches to health care delivery systems in a setting of limited resources and interventions, where the diagnosis is based primarily on information from the history and physical examination;

- To experience the impact of patient and/or community education on health care and health care status;
- To enhance patient-physician communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal and experience the issues involved with working with interpreters
- To participate in prevention activities and care of acute and/or chronic conditions that are unique to a particular geographic region (e.g., tropical illnesses or altitude-related issues)
- To provide education to a community group in the host community, using an interpreter if needed.

Objectives

They will need to focus on what the learner can do after the experience to demonstrate what they have learned. For example, based on the goals above:

1. Describe the health care system in your learning community and the influence of politics on access to health care; or discuss how the life styles and health beliefs of the population affect their health and care seeking in positive and negative ways;
2. Contrast the care provided to a patient in the local system with that provided in a resource-rich setting;
3. Reflect on the aspects of community and public health observed during the experience and how this differs from the health care system in the US.

Methods of evaluation

When the goals and objectives are determined, methods of evaluation should be clarified. This may consist of written papers, group and/or poster presentations, testing on specific content, and evaluation of level of participation or other methods.

Supervision

With proper preparation, the actual on-site experience can be an academic and personal highlight desired by both faculty and learner. On-site supervision is of importance just as with traditional educational experiences. Sponsoring institutions need to take the responsibility to assure this is arranged. There should be regular contact between faculty and learner to ensure that the goals and objectives are being achieved.

Preparing for and debriefing after an International Experience

It is important to prepare in advance for an optimal experience in an international setting. Preparation for an international experience can occur in a number of ways.

Courses or self-study

1. Some institutions offer specific courses that consist of one to four, week long formal classes.
2. Materials, printed and/or web-based, can be provided that allow for independent study.

Suggested curricular topics in preparation for international experiences

- Readings or background about the nation and region
- Cross-cultural communication including specific greetings and basic language skills
- Health planning including priority setting and payment system for health care
- Medical ethics in conditions of scarcity
- Community-oriented primary care
- Interdisciplinary team health care
- Family planning
- Maternal and child health
- Introduction to tropical medicine and advanced disease states common to the region
- Mental health in developing countries
- Nutrition and nutrition beliefs, common foods, breastfeeding practices
- Medical technology and sanitation

For some, this will be the first international travel experience. Other issues that need to be explained to the student or resident prior to leaving for an international rotation or clerkship include personal health, safety preparation, and basic legal and logistical issues.

Issues to be clarified and reviewed with the student or resident

- Supervision and expectations

Residents/Students should be encouraged to participate with appropriate supervision in medical practices that may not be activities that he/she would participate in at the home institution. However, the resident/student should not engage in unsupervised activities which are outside their medical privileges at home.

- Costs of transportation, food and housing
- Passport, visa

Below are some suggestions to address liability and malpractice coverage concerns.

Considerations Regarding Liability/Malpractice Coverage when Abroad

1. Prepare mandatory orientation programs that outline potential risks.
2. Require a physical exam and/or travel medicine consultation prior to leaving.
3. Require proof of insurance, including evacuation insurance prior to travel, e.g., evacuation insurance: International Student (or teacher) Identity Cards (ISIC): 1-800-226-8624 or <http://www.istc.org> or SOS Scholastic Traveler: (800) 767-1403 or <http://www.internationalsos.com/buymembership>.
4. Require the host country to submit a letter of understanding between the medical school and the international site stipulating a commitment to supervise the student during the rotation.
5. Provide the student with information on obtaining state department advisories: (888) 407-4747 or <http://travel.state.gov>
6. Provide student with information on how to obtain health advice, e.g., Center for Disease Control travel information: (877) 394-8747 or <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>.
7. Provide information regarding the risks of certain high-risk activities:
 - i. Sexual activity
 - ii. Auto accidents
 - iii. High altitude sickness
 - iv. Universal precautions and HIV/HBV/HCV risk and prevention
 - v. Animal bites and rabies.
 - vi. Political crises and risks for Americans
 - vii. Terrorist activities
 - viii. Unique risks and precautions for women
8. Avoidance of narcotics.
9. Require signature of understanding for each element of the informed consent.
10. Informed consent and indemnification letter should be reviewed by institutional attorney.

**GHEC Guidebook: Advising Medical Students and Residents for International Health Experiences. Used with permission and modification.*

- Personal prevention and health care issues
 - o Immunizations, spacing of shots
 - o HIV, TB, Malaria, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, etc.
 - o Required health and evacuation insurance
- Sight seeing and touring agendas, clarifying time off
- Local transportation and safety
- Personal and professional items to bring
- Contact via telephone and/or e-mail
- Duration of the rotation: Residency directors should consult the American Board of Family Medicine guidelines on "Absence from the Residency," <https://www.theabfm.org/residency/absence.aspx>

Post Experience Debriefing

In many cases, the student or resident will have had life-changing experiences and needs to have

a facilitated session to deal with the feelings and reactions to the international rotation. This can be accomplished in many different ways ranging from a slide show allowing for discussion about the experience to more formal presentations to students, residents and/or faculty. Faculty can help with framing these experiences to provide perspective and maximal growth in the resident or student.

A Statement to Residents and Medical Students Considering International Experiences

In order to prepare in advance for a maximally rewarding experience, it is suggested that you make every attempt to become familiar and knowledgeable regarding the cultural and medical environment in which you will learn and work. To the best of your ability, familiarize yourself with the expectations of the foreign

facility by researching cultural, social, and medical aspects of the work environment. If possible, contact directors, supervisors, and teachers of the host facility before arrival in order to establish a dialogue regarding environment and expectations. This initial exchange and independent research ought to facilitate your level of preparedness and comfort in learning about and participating in supervised unfamiliar medical practices not done at your home institution. Such exposure can be invaluable and provide unparalleled learning, expanding your breadth of experience outside the scope of the domestic medical practices to which you have become accustomed at your institution.

Online Resources

American Academy of Family Physicians — International Activities

International Family Medicine Website
www.aafp.org/international

International Health Care Opportunities in Family Medicine
www.aafp.org/cgi-bin/ihcp.pl

American Medical Student Association – Global Health Resources

Bringing International Health Home
www.amsa.org/resource/amsarc/bihh/bihh.cfm

Creative Funding for International Electives
www.amsa.org/resource/amsarc/creative/creative.cfm

Global Health Resources
www.amsa.org/global/ghres.cfm

International Health Opportunities Directory
www.amsa.org/global/ih/ihopps.cfm

A Student's Guide to International Health
www.amsa.org/pdf/studguide2ih.pdf

Where in the World
www.amsa.org/pdf/world.pdf

Society of Teachers of Family Medicine

International Health: A Manual for Advisers and Students
www.stfm.org/pdfs/International%20Health.pdf

Family Medicine Digital Resources Library (FMDRL)
www.fmdrl.org/index.cfm

Global Health Education Consortium (GHEC)

Annotated List of International Health Related Websites
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/Anno_resources.htm

Developing Global Health Curricula: A Guidebook for US Medical Schools
http://www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/Developing%20GH%20Curricula_Guidebook%20for%20US%20Medical%20Schools.pdf

Foreign Language Study and International Health Work: Selected Resources
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/ForeignLang_resources.htm

The GHEC Guidebook: Advising Medical Students and Residents for International Health Experiences
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/IHMECguidebk_resources.htm

Global Health Bibliography
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/GHbiblio_resources.htm

Global Health 'Players': Organizations Involved in International Health
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/GHplayers_resources.htm

Q&A Guidance for Persons Considering a Global Health Career
www.globalhealth-ec.org/GHEC/Resources/QAguidance_resources.htm

World Organization of Family Doctors (Wonca)

Global Family Doctor — Journal Alerts
www.globalfamilydoctor.com/enrollment.htm

Global Resource Directory
www.globalfamilydoctor.com/education/GlobalResourceDirectory/GRDIndex.asp

Member Organization Websites
<http://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/MO/MO.asp?refurl=aw>

Member Organization Websites
www.globalfamilydoctor.com/links/molinks.asp?refurl=aw

Wonca Publications
www.globalfamilydoctor.com/publications/publications.asp