



Other considerations:

Take care not to undermine local reputations. Be sure you are not taking business from local doctors in private practice.

Teaching others to do, rather than doing yourself, ultimately benefits more people.

Gifts of a recent ophthalmology textbook and/or surgical instruments may be greatly appreciated by local ophthalmologists.

Remember that you will be observed; people will be learning from you even if your primary task is not to teach. Good medicine is more than good surgical technique.

Do not promise future support unless you are certain that you will provide it.

The Academy's International Volunteer Registry is a computer program that can help you locate volunteer opportunities internationally.

It connects ophthalmologists and other eye care professionals who are interested in volunteering their skills and expertise to provide eye care services in economically developing nations with organizations and educational institutions in developing nations that need professional eye care personnel.

For more information contact Wendy Ovaitt at the Academy. Write to the address below, or call (415) 561-8500, ext. 281.



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***Guidelines for
Ophthalmologists
Volunteering in
Developing Nations***

Increasing numbers of ophthalmologists are volunteering to help their colleagues in developing nations. For most, this will not be a full time career. The problems of developing nations are complex and many professionals work in this field full time. The following points may be helpful for short-term ophthalmic volunteers.



Before going:

Educate yourself about the history and culture of the nation, the government structure and the health care infrastructure. Guide books usually review history and the current government. Newspaper archives may list useful articles. Previous reviews of the project you are joining may provide background information on the health care system. For example, the ratio of care delivered through public vs. private systems varies widely among nations. Most have more organized health care on the national and regional levels than does the United States.

Know what you are expected to do. Ask if there is anything you should bring.



Every nation has regulations about medical licensing. Be certain you can legally perform surgery or treat patients.



When you arrive:

Expand your understanding of the health care delivery system. What eye care services are available? Where do supplies come from? What is available locally? What are the major non-ophthalmologic health problems in the area?



As for surgery:

The surgeon is responsible for ascertaining that patients are appropriate surgery candidates. Never be pushed into operating when you think it may be inappropriate. Do not be afraid to cancel cases when you think it is necessary. Before you operate, be sure that adequate post-op care will be available. Do not feel that you have to do the most difficult cases. You may teach local ophthalmologists more by performing basic procedures.

It is ethically and medically correct to keep surgical records, albeit abbreviated. At a minimum, records should show the date of surgery, what was done, who did it, and any complications.

If you are teaching local surgeons, use instruments and supplies which they will have available after you leave. (You will have to learn what these are.) To do otherwise is not particularly helpful in the long run and can be frustrating for local physicians.