

Doctors Only

You are needed to go and serve in 3rd World missionary clinics and hospitals (short-term, long-term, any term). The NEEDS are growing in magnitude. Most 3rd World countries are getting further behind. Just set your mind and DO IT! Plan for it; make a commitment. Otherwise, it will never happen. Too many 'legitimate' reasons (excuses) will come leaping forth.

If you must take 'vacation time' in order to go, that's fine. Do it. You can go with your family or combine it with a typical family-type vacation. Going elsewhere to serve in health care missions is definitely a total break from your normal routine in medicine. Doesn't that describe a vacation?

Doctors, remember those early days in medical school when you didn't know for sure what you wanted to do? Perhaps you wanted to do a little bit of everything. Welcome to diverse medicine – 3rd World style. This is where a medical license means that you can do ANYTHING. That's right - ANYTHING! You don't need specialized residency training to do this or that. OB, orthopedics, general surgery, even burr holes if you like – all of these and much more can be done with the basic medical license. For those of you who are not intimidated by this, go for it! Of course you must learn. Talk to your USA specialist friends; build up your library. Then go and do it. You may be the best doctor available – perhaps the ONLY doctor available. Your guide for what you do becomes, "Do I have a chance of doing more good than harm for these patients?"

Share your faith. How many constraints do you have in the USA to openly sharing your religious faith to patients and their families? Many. There are no such constraints in the 3rd World countries in which I have served. Share freely, openly, meaningfully, and as often as you feel compelled to do so. The more you share; the easier it becomes.

You get to throw away those infernal, omnipresent beepers and cell phones! There are none. You will have no demands from afar. You can FOCUS all your attention where you are.

Patient appreciation. You will feel a personal and professional worth that you may have forgotten was possible. You will remember why you went into medicine in the first place. It is not imaginable how much you will be appreciated by your patients and their families - even lifted up on lofty pedestals. It is very humbling. You will be serving where patients believe the following defines medical success: "To succeed is to TRY." Compare this to the USA where patients believe that, "to succeed is to be cured or to have a favorable result." The converse to this in the USA is that, "Since I didn't get a good result, someone must have done something wrong". Of course now I'm speaking of the USA's terrible, prevalent, litigious mindset. What a pleasant relief to leave this concern behind when you serve in the 3rd World!

Then there is all the paper work, the record keeping, the dictating, the constraints of

administrators and managers and insurance companies and on and on. WHEW! Just think of medicine practiced without all this. Now add to this the fact that doctors are still in charge of clinics and hospitals – they are the primary decision makers. No, I'm not speaking of "doctor utopia" or "doctor nirvana"; I'm speaking of medicine in most developing nations. You must be aware, of course, that health care in these nations comes with its own set of inherent difficulties. But what a joy to serve where the needs are so great and where you feel totally appreciated, yet serving without many of the constraints and trappings of our 1st World!!

When working in the 3rd World, you will need all the talents and skills you possess – and more. You will need to resurrect those long lost abilities that you put aside because you were too busy with medicine. I'm talking primarily about fixing things – from electrical, to plumbing, to cars, to furniture, to medical equipment, to 'you name it.' Sometimes I wonder who is the most important person on a missionary medicine compound – the doctor or the "Mr. Fixit". The key: you must be flexible, adaptable, good at improvising. Relax and enjoy these newly found roles. Variety is indeed the spice of your missionary life.

Professionally you will be gratified by all the people you can help, all the suffering you can relieve, and all the teaching you can do. Furthermore, you will be intellectually challenged and stimulated by the myriad, exotic diseases you have only read about. There will be late stage presentations of disease that you never thought possible. You can share these cases (stories) in medical conferences 'back home'. You will become the local 'expert' in tropical medicine. I hope and pray that you will be motivated to return again and again for service in 3rd World medicine. Take other doctors and health care personnel with you. Include medical students and residents in your entourage. Oftentimes, they can get official credit from their schools or programs. God bless you.