

MEDICAL MISSIONS

THE NEED

The need for medical mission work is world-wide. Many countries have a modern capital city with fancy hotels, highrise buildings, Mercedes benz cars on the streets, and then the rest of the country where there is abject poverty. Many places in this world do little or nothing for the poor. It is not part of their culture.

The U.S., on the other hand, is a very generous country, which exhibits much compassion to the down-trodden of this world. If it were not for some of these mission hospitals, literally millions of people would not receive any medical care. It is estimated that the total contribution to the needs of the world from the private sector is 5 times the total foreign aid contribution of the federal government. More importantly, the aid goes directly to the needs of the people, not through the local government.

There is always a need for anesthesia providers, especially pediatrics, in numerous locations. Opportunities for service range from, as little as two weeks with a team who go to a particular location – to years. Sometimes a month or two would allow a long-term provider to have a little break. They work so hard with no let up

HOW DO YOU GET INVOLVED

There are a number of organizations you can work through. These organizations usually provide the logistical support by arranging transportation, housing, food and paper-work for the country visited. Sometimes temporary medical licenses are needed. Some Organizations are: World Medical Missions, Helps International, Mercy Ships and many more.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

As you can imagine, it is all over the place from very primitive to somewhat up-to-date. Some organizations bring very simple portable anesthesia machines, and monitors. Several organizations refurbish used anesthesia machines and monitors and then ship them to these remote locations. Ether is still used in this world! Because some mission hospitals have no anesthesia providers – ketamine and spinals are the mainstay. On many short-term outreaches there will be a complete team. The most common surgeries for children will be cleft-lip and palette repairs, but also eye surgery, (strabismus) general surgery, orthopedics and burn surgery.

WORK

You will be stretched professionally. You may have minimal lab work, or none. In Africa, possibly because of malaria, very low hemaglobins are encountered. Do you do Surgery on a child with a hemaglovin of 7.5 with no possibility of transfusion? What if You have no lab work? You had better be prepared to deal with undiagnosed and untreated reactive airway disease. Many people live in structures where a smoky fire is in The middle of the room. Imagine what this does to the airways of these children. Plus, The children who fall and get burned. Some populations have a higher genetic predisposition to malignant hyperthermia. You will encounter some very challenging Anesthesia situations.

SUMMARY

Your accommodations may not be very comfortable, (i.e. cold showers)...food will be different....you may have to get a bunch of shots, take antimalarials. Your working hours will be long and exhausting:

Positive aspects of medical mission work:

1. You won't be sued
2. The patients and or their parents will be so grateful
3. You will be helping people who could not have otherwise been helped.
4. You will be one of the finest ambassadors for your country possible. (talk is cheap, actions count).
5. It may be physically uncomfortable, professionally challenging...but incredibly rewarding.