

So You Want to Be a Mission Doctor?

Tips and Tricks from the Field



MISSION DOCTORS ASSOCIATION
A Mission of Healing, A Partnership of Hope



MDA Founder Msgr. Anthony Brouwers



Mission Doctor Jennifer Thoene in Cameroon

We at Mission Doctors Association are so happy you are considering sharing your medical skills with people served at Mission Hospitals. You will be joining with others who have followed a call to serve in around the world since 1959.

While there are locations where we have been able to 'work ourselves out of a job' there continues to be a great need for Catholic Doctors who feel called to share their gifts as they live their faith.



We've added to our web site a [Service FAQ](#) that may answer additional questions, regarding a spouse and children, housing, etc. We invite you to contact us directly with any additional questions you may have.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elise Frederick".

Elise Frederick, Executive Director

Travel in Mission Lands

After you've had the opportunity to attend our Retreat/Seminar you may have an idea where you would like to serve. Ideally it is a location where your specific skills can be utilized and where you are needed at the same time you can serve. We want it to be a mutual match! Once you have identified a time that you will be available, contact the office to coordinate the details of your trip. We generally need a minimum of three to six months to arrange everything.

We will work with you to arrange your visa, tickets, and itinerary.



Happy patients are our favorite sight!

We'll provide a more complete list when your service is arranged, but here's an abridged list of things you'll want to consider when packing for your trip:

- Bring a white coat and your own diagnostic tools.
- Men should bring a tie and at least one shirt that you can wear with a tie, plus a pair of closed shoes that can be 'polished'.
- Women at many sites wear mostly longer skirts. Pants are fine for around the house, but at many sites would be inappropriate at the hospital or church.
- Laundry is hand washed, line dried and ironed. Take this into consideration when choosing what clothes to bring.
- Pack the essentials and a complete change of clothes in your carry on, and several extra pairs of underwear just in the event you never see your checked luggage again.

Communications



Dr. Brian Medernach in Peru



Happy mothers and babies are what we like to see!

Communication with friends and family back home, while on a mission trip is so much easier than it was fifty years ago.

All locations have the availability for cell phone service and internet connection. And while some locations have better service than others, you will be able to send and receive emails. We will also work with you to set up a blog to help you share your mission experience.

At times it can be challenging to find the right words to convey what can be a life changing experience.

For the first timer it can be overwhelming to observe the lack of what we see as basic necessities. The difference in the ways things are done, or not done, the standards of care, the length of time people are willing to wait, and the stoicism when facing dramatic illness and death can be difficult to share.

You will observe great suffering, and great courage. By communicating with people from home, you will be able to help people understand not only the tremendous need, but the amazing strength and faith of people who carry burdens we cannot even imagine.

Culture and Medical Care

One of the great joys of doing medical missionary work is living and working among people with life experiences different from our own. Exposure to a new language, different foods, distinctive dress, and unique social conventions can combine to form a rich and unforgettable experience.

Alternatively, the unfamiliar customs of a new locale can become one of your greatest challenges - especially when the community in which you are working comprises not just one culture, but several distinct cultures.

Ironically, all of the wonderful skills and traits that are drummed into you during medical training - precision, thorough history-taking, orderly and sequential communication, uniformity of practice - can become disadvantages when working among people whose cultural traditions collide with these practices.

Patients' medical history may not be available to you as accurately or as comprehensively as it generally is in the United States. Patients may answer yes to all your questions because they think you prefer that. They may severely understate their symptoms. All of these issues will be very different from what you are used to.

Working with a long-term Mission Doctor at the site, or identifying someone who can help you navigate the challenges can make a tremendous difference. Speaking to other doctors who have served before you may help give you some tools for these situations. In the end, we do our best and leave the rest to God.



Near the chapel at Njinkiom Hospital in Cameroon

Medical Care at a Mission Hospital

Medical Care at a mission hospital is best learned with an approach of taking the skills and knowledge you already have and applying them to a new situation. Learning what drugs and labs are available is a good place to start. Ask those who are already serving if it is prudent to order tests which would be considered routine at home but which may present a financial burden to the patient or their family.

It is important to be willing to read and be creative in asking what can be done with resources available in a given medical situation. Primary Care providers will be challenged with uncommon illnesses such as cryptococcal meningitis and malaria. Specialist physicians may be similarly challenged in the treatment of primary care illnesses which they do not see in their everyday practice.

While you will not be expected to practice outside of your area of expertise, many physicians will find themselves needing to reacquaint themselves with medical procedures they have not done recently. This topic is discussed during our Retreat/Seminar. It is all part of the work of serving our sisters and brothers at a Mission Hospital.

*Whoever serves me must
follow me; and where I am,
my servant also will be.
My Father will honor the
one who serves me.
John 12:26*



Dr. Clare Coda in Cameroon

Recommended Reading

If you've never served at a Mission Hospital before, not knowing what to expect can be exhilarating, frightening, or a combination of the two! Here are some resources our doctors have found useful in preparing for a trip:

Tropical Medicine Lecture Notes, 7th Ed.

Edited by Nick Beeching, Geoff Gill. Wiley Blackwell.

Available on Amazon for Kindle or in Paperback:

<https://www.amazon.com/Lecture-Notes-Tropical-Nick-Beeching/dp/0470658533>

Guidelines for the Treatment of Malaria. WHO (April, 2015)

Available as Online Book and Hardcopy:

<http://www.who.int/malaria/publications/atoz/9789241549127/en/>

AIDS Education Training Center National HIV Curriculum

<https://aidsetc.org/nhc>

National Institute of Health AIDS info Clinical Guidelines

<https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/guidelines>

Treatment of Tuberculosis Guidelines. WHO (2010)

<http://www.who.int/tb/publications/9789241547833/en/>

The Handbook of Medicine in Developing Countries, Fourth Edition

Dennis Palmer, D.O. and Catherine E. Wolf, M.D. M.P.H.

The Christian Medical & Dental Association

<https://cmda.org/bookstore/product/the-handbook-of-medicine-4th-edition>

Doctors Without Borders Clinical Guidelines Diagnosis & Treatment Manual

Online Book

(multiple books of interest including MSF Field Manual, Tuberculosis):

http://www.refbooks.msf.org/msf_docs/en/MSFdocMenu_en.htm



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ASSOCIATION

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Following Christ's call to heal the sick, Mission Doctors Association provides lifesaving medical care for the poor and training for local healthcare professionals around the world.

To learn more about Mission Doctors visit www.MissionDoctors.org