

MEDICAL VOLUNTEER



H.E.R.O Global

CRVA

Practicing Medicine in a Rural Third-World Mission Clinic

Adapted from Grant Correll

Understanding Your Patients

Having a basic understanding of the community you serve is crucial. For agricultural societies, medication instructions might be better expressed as “one pill at sunrise and one at sunset” instead of “one pill every 12 hours.”

Keep it Simple

Provide clear and straightforward medication instructions. For example, say, “One pill a day—no more, no less—until all are gone.”

Limit Prescriptions

Try to limit each patient to one medication, a bag of vitamins, and some analgesics to avoid overwhelming them with multiple prescriptions. Always adhere to the principle of “first, do no harm.”

Avoid Complex Medications

Steer clear of medications that require monitoring or have numerous adverse reactions.

Manage Quantity

The clinic may attract more patients than you can see. Many will have traveled far. Focus on a brief history and physical examination, treating one or two manageable complaints.

Emphasize Quality

While time with each patient is limited, aim to educate. Simple advice, like using aloe vera for burns, can greatly benefit patients.

Understand Drug Responses

Many patients are “pharmacologically naive,” so lower doses may work effectively. For instance, 250mg of Amoxicillin might be sufficient compared to the higher doses typically prescribed in the U.S.

Recognize Common Illnesses

Don’t assume every health issue is exotic; common diseases like candidiasis and scabies are still prevalent.

Basic Medical Principles

The history and physical examination are your best tools for patient assessment, more so than advanced imaging.

Focus on One Complaint

Patients may bring multiple concerns, but prioritize one or two that you can treat effectively.

Vitamins and Analgesics

Parents often seek reassurance about their children's health. Offering vitamins is often the best remedy. For adults, simple analgesics like ibuprofen or acetaminophen can provide relief.

Saying “No”

It’s acceptable to decline non-medical requests such as financial help or sponsorships.

Take Breaks

Don’t risk burnout. Take time to recharge during your clinic days.

Stay Fair

Treat all patients equally and avoid favoritism. Stick to protocols to maintain order.

Only Treat Present Patients

Avoid prescribing for those who are not present without a proper examination.

Impact of Your Work

Recognize that what can be achieved in a one-week mission is temporary. However, long-term commitment can lead to meaningful change in the community. Take time to appreciate this unique opportunity.