

What is the Benefit of Short-term Medical Mission Trips?

By Callyn Parker

A pharmacist in a busy community pharmacy is on the phone with an insurance company while verifying prescriptions for the long line of patients on the other side of the counter. While holding the bag of prescriptions in her hand, she realizes that it is a new antibiotic for a toddler. Placing the insurance call on hold, she goes to the register to explain to the toddler's mother how to dose the medication accurately. Her visibility and accessibility



prompts a series of questions from other patients: what to do for this blister, what to take for that cough. She is able to share the love of God with her patients by providing pharmaceutical care.

Now imagine a pharmacist in a rural area of a developing country. This pharmacist is dispensing critical medications to hundreds of patients a day during a week-long medical mission trip. He takes the time to counsel each patient on the value of and instructions for each prescription. Similar to the community pharmacist, he is able to make interventions and educate patients about medicine. He has the opportunity to minister to his patients who may not otherwise receive spiritual or pharmaceutical care. On a daily basis, pharmacists are challenged to provide optimal patient care to each and every patient. While it is impossible to meet every need and solve every problem, pharmacists can intervene in many different settings, allowing for the dissemination of information to providers and patients alike.

This past summer I was blessed to travel with a team to the Dominican Republic. Prior to the trip, I received questions such as, "Is it really helpful when they are only getting a short duration of missionary help?" This concept is the topic of debate in various forums. Many are unaware of the

benefits provided to patients in indigenous countries from these trips. Additionally, partnership with missionary organizations can facilitate continued relationships with the patients.

While on my trip, I had the opportunity to meet physicians and missionaries dedicated to the service of the patients in that area. I spent one full day with the pediatric physicians. They were so thankful that we were at this specific clinic, because many of the patients in that area did not have the transportation to go to a pharmacy or a doctor. Our clinic was able to provide some relief for the mothers with sick children.

One unexpected blessing was the close relationship that we built with the missionaries. Many spoke English and were serving as our translators when we counseled on prescriptions. After a few days, I knew enough Spanish to counsel some patients on my own. In turn, they had learned a few pharmacy basics such as recognizing certain indications and knowing which medications needed to be taken with food. We were also able to help build relationships between the patients and the missionaries which will continue to grow long after our time there.

Foremost, the ultimate goal of a medical mission trip is to spread the Word of God to the ends of the earth. Paul discusses this concept when he is preaching to the Gentiles at Antioch in Acts 13. He implores followers of Christ to be a light for the Lord and to tell of the gift of salvation. There is no amount of medication that can give patients the eternal life they can have in Christ. Recognition of this fact is essential for any practitioner planning a short-term trip.

Ultimately as Christians, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Aspiring to lead a life like Christ includes humbling oneself to care for those who are unable to help themselves. Pharmacists are committed to the welfare of humanity and the relief of suffering. Providing care for



patients at home or abroad should always have the goal of leading others to Christ. Just as we are called to develop and cultivate younger generations of pharmacists, we are also able to educate and equip patients with the knowledge needed to care for themselves and their families.

Whether you are in a community pharmacy in the United States or a clinic in a developing country, you are in your mission field. While medicine may help our physical bodies, we can only be spiritually and eternally healed through Christ. Christian pharmacists have the unique ability to share the Gospel through their actions in any setting. Community pharmacists may have opportunities to share their faith with their staff and patients as they build long-term relationships with them. Pharmacists on the mission field meet new people every day, allowing their testimony to be spread among everyone they meet. While the practice sites may vary, the end goal remains the same: to be the hands and feet that bring people to Christ across the earth. Access to healthcare and medicine should not be a privilege, but rather a commodity. Until this goal is achieved, we are called as Christian pharmacists to promote and advocate for the safe and effective use of medications to all patients in all populations.



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Reflections of La Frontera: A Medical Brigade to Honduras

By Danielle Tully and Carrie L. Griffiths

As a fourth-year pharmacy student, I have learned to appreciate the slightly intimidating, yet educational experiences that have been part of my experiential curriculum at Wingate University School of Pharmacy. It was these rotations that, by expanding my knowledge and level of comfort, motivated me about my future as a practicing pharmacist. However, rarely did I feel that I belonged to any particular area of pharmacy, as I often enjoyed the specialties. Graduation was around the corner, and I was beginning to lose focus on what it was that I really wanted to do for my pharmacy career. How would I begin to find joy and pleasure in my chosen profession of pharmacy?

Rewind to the summer months during my undergraduate years, I consistently

found myself working at a local mission program called The Hinton Center. After falling in love with local outreach work, I knew that God would allow this type of service to find its way back to me. Without knowing when or how, I continued to embark on my life's journey.

It happened during a meeting block on campus. A fourth-year pharmacy student spoke about her experience during an international rotation. This was it! My very first opportunity to combine service with pharmacy. The tiny flame that I thought was buried years ago reignited with a force so strong, nothing had the chance of preventing me from going. Not lack of money, not personal struggles with faith, not anything. I spent the next few months researching about medical

