

Health Volunteers Overseas – Making a Global Connection

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Sharing the perspective and influence of CRNAs through our work with external organizations is not limited to the boundaries of our country. Having a global connection expands the AANA mission of advancing patient safety and excellence in anesthesia to other countries that do not have the resources we have in the United States. In fact, the Institute of Medicine states in its 2009 report on the U.S. Commitment to Global Health that a major way to improve global health and serve the global poor is through sharing knowledge, strengthening health education, and enabling local leaders to improve the health of their populations (www.iom.edu/usandglobalhealth).

The AANA and its volunteer members have helped to grow the specialty of nurse anesthesia and improve the quality of anesthesia care for patients across the globe through volunteer work with other organizations. CRNAs are a giving group. CRNAs have shared their time, talent, and knowledge with the global community through countless trips. Many CRNA colleagues have formed relationships with surgical groups and return to the same place, region, or country year after year. Several universities have established relationships with schools in other countries and are working within those communities to improve anesthesia provider education.

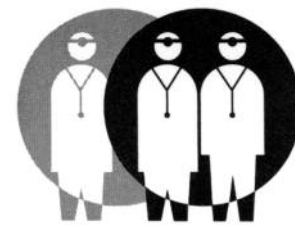
HVO—Opportunities to Serve

One of the organizations that the AANA and its members work with to have an impact on global health is Health Volunteers Overseas (HVO). HVO was founded in 1986 as a private, nonprofit membership organization. On its website HVO is described as “a network of health care professionals, organizations, corporations and donors united in a common commitment to improving global health through education.”

HVO works to improve the quality of healthcare in less-developed nations by providing training and education to health-care providers in their own countries. HVO currently provides more than 80 clinical educational programs in 25 developing countries. Educational programs have been designed and implemented in the areas of child health, primary care, trauma and rehabilitation, essential surgical care, oral health, blood disorders and cancer, infectious disease, and nursing education. Volunteers train, mentor, and provide critical professional support to healthcare providers who care for the neediest populations in the most difficult of circumstances. You can learn more about HVO by visiting the website (www.hvousing.org) or contacting the HVO Program Department at (202) 296-0928. HVO also exhibits at the AANA Annual Meeting.

HVO has established nurse anesthesia educational programs in Guyana and Belize. HVO has worked within local systems in Cambodia and Eritrea to improve the education foundations in those countries. Currently HVO is involved, in various stages, in Cambodia, Eritrea, Vietnam, Bhutan, and Ethiopia. HVO has provided support and education to nurse anesthetists in two nongovernment-sponsored hospitals in Cambodia for eight years. In Bhutan, HVO is starting a school of nurse anesthesia, with the first cohort to be admitted summer 2010. An advance team recently visited Vietnam to determine the exact nature of HVO involvement, but it is anticipated that volunteers will be sent to work with the faculty at the school of nurse anesthesia in Ho Chi Min City. Ethiopia is in an exploratory phase to begin a nurse anesthesia program. Eritrea has also had support from volunteers to its nurse anesthesia program during the past three years.

HVO is supported by memberships, grants, and corporate sponsorships. The



Health Volunteers Overseas

AANA is part of this network of organizations and donors that strive to improve global health through education. The AANA and HVO have had a relationship since the AANA became a sponsor in 1992. Your membership supports its work, even if you are unable to serve directly in a volunteer capacity.

In 1992, HVO established the Nurse Anesthesia Overseas Committee. The Council for Public Interest in Anesthesia (CPIA) sponsored the first volunteer anesthesia session at an Annual Meeting well over a decade ago. There was a packed crowd, and those who could not find a seat lined the back wall. The large number of attendees at the Nurse Anesthesia Overseas session at the 2009 Annual Meeting indicates CRNAs maintain a strong interest in global volunteer opportunities.

Many AANA members are part of the HVO network of professionals, and HVO has recognized some AANA members for exceptional volunteer service. Suzanne Brown, CRNA, BSN; Mattie Lou Catchpole, CRNA, PhD; Richard Henker, CRNA, PhD, FAAN; and Marvin Lang, CRNA, MA, all have received the Golden Apple Award for their exemplary service to HVO.

Other Volunteer Opportunities

While the AANA has an organizational relationship with HVO, many other groups also provide global volunteer opportunities. How do you find a group? A religious affiliation is

often a convenient starting point to find out about volunteer opportunities, both local and long distance. Many service teams arise out of interest groups in an individual's operating room setting. Orthopedics, plastic surgery, ophthalmology, and gynecology teams are common types of service groups that require anesthesia support.

Each group and place has their unique requirements, but in general a caring heart and a desire to serve form the core of those requirements. Volunteer teams working in other countries are always subject to the needs and requirements of the host country and facility. Some organizations provide for expenses, but more expect the volunteers to provide their own transportation and other living costs. These volunteer opportunities have varying time commitments but, in general, most require a two-week commit-

ment. Some have terms that may last up to one year, often providing compensation for expenses and some stipend support. See the list of websites at the end of this article for information about a variety of volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers Reap Many Rewards

The rewards of volunteering are enormous. Your investment of time, talent, and treasure will come back to you in many different ways. Both authors of this column can personally attest to the feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment you will have at the conclusion of your volunteer experience. You will learn more about yourself and your own ability to be creative and persevere under less than ideal conditions. You will become a better practitioner for the experience! There should be one caution to all however—it can become addic-

tive. Some CRNAs volunteer their time, talent and treasure again and again. ■

Reference Websites/Search Venues

Health Volunteers Overseas: www.hvousa.org

Society for Pediatric Anesthesia:
www.pedsanesthesia.org/vmsa_search.iphtml

Operation Smile: www.operationssmile.org

Healing the Children:
www.healingthechildren.org

Medical Teams International: www.nwmti.org

Operation Giving Back:
www.operationgivingback.org

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