

Over the years, many HVO volunteers have requested guidelines and suggestions on how to talk about their volunteer experiences. This document was created for that purpose. While many volunteers have academic backgrounds and are accustomed to presenting their work, a presentation about a volunteer assignment can be rather different. The guidelines here are meant to provide some insight and guidance on how your presentation can impact your audience. It is based on feedback provided by volunteers and incorporates their experiences, both good and bad! Best wishes as you share your story!



TELLING HVO'S STORY

When volunteers return home, they are frequently asked to share their experience, either informally with colleagues and friends or more formally with the local media or professional groups such as the local medical society. For many volunteers, this HVO overseas assignment is a transformative one — opening new horizons and introducing new perspectives on day-to-day life and work. Sharing can be fun and may serve to entice others to consider similar service in their own lives.

Keep in mind, however, that many of your listeners may have never left the US and your talk may be their introduction to the developing world. Your words and images will shape your listener's understanding of HVO so it is important that your presentation conveys our mission and approach both simply and clearly. You also want your presentation to create an excitement and interest in the developing world, so please don't shock your audience out of a potential volunteer or travel experience!

HVO is a teaching/training organization and our programs are designed to build the capacity of the health care providers at the sites. This is different from the approach of many other organizations, which fly teams of personnel to a site, do a series of operations, and depart. HVO programs are focused on long-term development and address the shortage of health care workers, a problem the World Health Organization identified as the most crucial in public health. Emphasize that in HVO's programs, you are not starting from scratch. HVO works with established professional institutions, many of which have a long and distinguished history. Although your volunteer assignment was of a short-term nature, HVO's commitment is for the long-term and each volunteer is building on the work of earlier volunteers.



Similarly, it is important to emphasize that the colleagues with whom you worked at the site are professionals, many of whom may have had international training. Many have access, albeit erratic, to the Internet and are eager for information and professional contact with colleagues worldwide. They are making a commitment to their own country's health care and HVO is there to assist with further education and training based on the country's national

health plans. It might be helpful to imagine that one of your colleagues from the site is in the room with you as you think about your presentation. That will remind you of how important it is to be culturally sensitive. Put yourself in the shoes of your colleague – that will help you choose appropriate language and avoid language that might sound patronizing or condescending.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” No matter how well you verbally present HVO's work, one photo can damage your presentation. Share photos of you and your colleagues at the site, at work and relaxing together, sharing in each other's company. It is important to convey that HVO is developing relationships with the people we are training so show them as professionals and maintain their sense of dignity. This applies to photos of the facility as well. You may have taken a photo of a dumpster just outside the operating room, but this is not a photo to share in a presentation, as that will be the only memory your listener retains. Similarly, with photos of young children – share the ones of the lively, smiling children playing in the courtyard, not the ones of children with flies covering their faces. Be particularly sensitive about showing patient photos, so you preserve the person's dignity and avoid showing anything that might be intrusive or violate their privacy.



Think about your audience and tailor your presentation accordingly. With health care colleagues, you may wish to discuss some of the work challenges, the appropriate technology used in a resource-poor situation, the diseases or health conditions that were unique to that area, etc. With local community groups (church, Rotary Club, etc) you might want to give a broader presentation that looks at global health issues and how HVO is addressing the shortage of health care workers. In a presentation with the media, you might focus more on why education is crucial in addressing global health issues and the role of short-term volunteers in meeting that need.

Dress appropriately as well. If you are presenting in front of a community or school group and your presentation will focus primarily on cultural aspects, then it might be appropriate to dress in traditional clothing. However, if you are presenting to your health care colleagues or the media, then it is not professional to wear traditional clothes from the site.

Just as you served as an “ambassador” representing HVO and the US at your work site, so, too, you are now an ambassador for the people and facility where you volunteered your knowledge and skills. Many volunteers speak of how the experience transformed their lives, renewed their enthusiasm for their work as they met new challenges, and gave them new insight to their own professional abilities. Convey your enthusiasm, your amazement at how much can be done with limited resources, and encourage your audience to consider volunteering (or donating) in whatever capacity they can!

POINTS TO REMEMBER

HVO's role:

Maintain the dignity of the people with whom we work, both professionals and patients

Education is a two way street – we teach and learn from our peers and colleagues at the sites

Key talking points – Making the Case:

Developing countries have extremely limited resources. The World Health Organization reports that per capita expenditures on health care in 30 countries is less than \$20, compared to \$6103 in the US.

The “brain drain” contributes to a significant outflow of health care professionals from developing to developed countries. It is estimated that 20,000 highly skilled people leave Africa every year in search of better living conditions.

Many developing countries do not have the financial resources to invest in continuing education of health care providers.

Investing in the education of health care providers is critical to a country's ability to deliver needed health services.

Health Volunteers Overseas implements innovative, effective programs that meet the needs of the host country and institution, are sustainable, and build local capacity.



POINTS TO REMEMBER

Language to Use When Speaking of Colleagues at the Site:

- Hard-working
- Resourceful
- Creative
- Generous
- Appreciative of volunteers

Words/Images to avoid:

- Natives, peasants
- Charity
- Emotive words: Dirty, slovenly, disgusting, greedy
- Descriptions such as “fly-encrusted”
- “They don’t place the same value on life as we do.”
- God-forsaken place
- Hopeless, primitive, ignorant, uncared for
- Mission trip – this has a religious connotation and HVO is an independent, secular organization



Tips on Dealing with the Media:

- Always get the name and contact information for the reporter
- Do your homework before the interview
- Find out the reporter’s story angle
- Listen carefully to the questions
- Provide direct and concise answers; don’t use jargon
- Speak in complete sentences since that results in better quotes
- Never say anything you would regret seeing in print (or hearing on the radio, etc)
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, refer the reporter to the HVO office for more information
- Let the reporter know you are available for follow-up questions if needed
- Let HVO know about your interview and when it will be published

“I have found my experience exceptionally rewarding in many aspects. Professionally, I have been able to contribute with the development of the hematology and oncology services and the learning process of several medical students, residents at the University of Makerere and house staff of the Mulago hospital. Medical students and residents are really appreciative of the teaching efforts and remarkably interested in learning and listening to what you have to say. Personally, it has been an incredible and rewarding experience that has allowed me to see life in a different perspective with a more satisfying and appreciative attitude. I am convinced that my labor has not finished with this experience. This is one of many other HVO trips to come. As a matter of fact, I am looking forward to be part of the change at Mulago hospital.”