

Medical Outreach Tips for Sustainability

Short-term medical missions can provide communities with access to lifesaving medical care. These medical missions often deliberately serve areas with few other medical resources. This can lead to profound impact but raises challenges for patient follow-up and continuity of care after the missions have completed their work. In light of this, AmeriCares met with representatives from several short-term medical mission teams to discuss their approach to sustainability, with the goal of identifying best practices. The context of each mission is unique, and not all of the listed best practices will be applicable to a given site. Rather, it is our hope that organizations running medical missions can select and adapt the best practices most relevant to them.

Continuity

- Visit the same location as often as possible.
 - Scheduling multiple missions per year to the same location helps create continuity of care, facilitate follow-up, build local trust and create a culture of care seeking.
- Coordinate with other organizations running short term medical missions to visit the same location.
 - This can create more continuity by ensuring care is available more frequently.
 - Coordination can help guide clinical hand-offs and improve longitudinal care.

Care During Mission

- Schedule follow up appointments for selected patients at the end of the mission.
 - This can help to ensure patients are doing well on new medications or post-procedure and identify potential problems.
- Give patients care summaries to guide other providers.
 - This can help facilitate transfer of care (where available) and ensure local providers understand the treatment plan in place.
- Tailor the scope of work to include some prevention efforts and other interventions that may not require follow-up.

Capacity Building

- Incorporate a training component into each mission.
 - Training can be for doctors, medical students, nurses or other health care workers.
 - Coordinating with local health officials on this is a best practice.
- Train staff on equipment and then leave the equipment with them at the end of the mission.
 - For example, one staff provided training on and then left behind a Tono-Pen for glaucoma screening.
 - Monitors (such as blood pressure cuffs and glucometers) can be given to clinics or to patients for home use.
 - When leaving equipment, it is helpful to think through a realistic maintenance plan so that items can remain operational.
- Provide ongoing remote support through telemedicine or regular check-ins.

- This can be by providing remote care to patients or supporting local providers through remote consultations.

Leverage Local Infrastructure

- Coordinate with Ministry of Health and local health officials before, during and after mission.
 - This can help identify needs, improve coordination with local clinics and plan for patient continuity.
- Mapping of local health services.
 - This can help identify patient options and care gaps. It can also help mission team members understand emergency care options, referral networks and capacity for patient follow-up after the mission has ended.
- Link with existing clinics.
 - In addition to providing space, durable supplies and a patient base, local clinics can help arrange post-mission follow-up and provide an opportunity for local health care worker training.
- Formally sign out/hand over treatment plans for complicated cases to staff at local clinics.
 - This can help make patients and clinical staff aware of the ongoing treatment plan and provide capacity-building opportunities.

Medicines and Supplies

- Develop continuity plans when starting patients on chronic medications.
 - This helps patients stay on medication for chronic conditions in areas where they may not otherwise be able to access medication.
- Where possible, bring enough medications to last patients until the next mission visit
 - *Unfortunately, due to our partnership agreements with pharmaceutical donors, AmeriCares is unable to provide medications intended to be used beyond the period of the medical mission.*
- Tailor the list of medications used to those available in a given country
 - This can help ensure patients have greater access to refills after the mission has ended.

Financial Support

- Use mission-related fundraising to pay for long term clinical staff salary
 - This can be for an existing staff member or a new role that helps ensure patients seen during the mission are able to follow the treatment plan after the mission has ended.
- Create a small endowment for local staff or other clinical needs
- Create a fund to pay for patient transportation to clinics or for clinical staff to visit a community.
- Create a fund to assist patients in purchasing medication refills after the mission has ended.