

Guidelines for Donations and Gifts

Donations are generally discouraged and should be neither an expectation nor a requirement for trainees participating in field experiences. This document provides some guidelines for those who choose to provide gifts or donations.

Guidelines and Recommendations Regarding Donations

There are many potential pitfalls with respect to well-intended donations and gifts. The following guidelines should be used to minimize unforeseen complications.

- Give your host the opportunity to guide you to ensure that your gift is welcome, appropriate, and needed.
- The initial communication should be worded in a way that allows you to inquire about what is needed or desired by your hosts without committing you to bringing things that you cannot reasonably provide.
- Employ the five core principles cited above. Prior to any donation, ask yourself if the donation meets all five principles. If it does not meet the core principles, strongly consider leaving it home.
 1. Maximum Benefit to recipient
 2. Respect the wishes and the authority of the recipient
 3. Does not create a double standard
 4. Results from effective communication between donor and recipient
 5. Does not create future expectations that can not be met.
- Do not distribute gifts or donations directly to patients. If you do bring things with you to donate, consider giving them to your hosting supervisor or the head of the hosting organization and asking them to distribute the donations as they see fit.
- Prior to making a donation, research what the in-country tax (if any) will be assessed for each donation and determine who will cover those costs.

Categories of Donations and Potential Pitfalls

Material Goods and Gifts

It is often customary to bring gifts to the family or professional who is hosting a trainee. When a gift is something particularly requested by the host or is an item that holds meaning for the visitor, it can have a long-lasting positive impact for both the host and visitor.

Giving material goods or gifts to patients, strangers, and colleagues can pose ethical dilemmas. The giving of gifts by a visiting physician in a medical setting jeopardizes the professional relationship that exists between patient and medical personnel. Even small gifts can alter the therapeutic relationship and establish unrealistic expectations for future visitors (e.g., the expectation of hospitalized children that all visitors will bring toys, stickers, or pens based on their experience with a prior visiting trainee who brought them these items). A similar

phenomenon may exist when gifts are given to strangers or acquaintances in the community. For group travel, the coordination of gifts for hosts will avoid embarrassment or misunderstandings.

Money and Scholarship Requests

For many participating in a field experience, there will be a large discrepancy between the wealth and resources available to visiting trainees and the people with whom they will work. The cost of a trainee's plane ticket alone may surpass the annual salary of some patients or hosting colleagues. This disconnect may create an undeniable but often unspoken difficulty for both the host and visitor. Visitors may encounter situations in which they are asked for money or sponsorship/scholarship for a co-worker, patient, or friend. The limitations, future obligations, and sustainability of such donations are frequently problematic. Additionally, differentiating between multiple requests or escalating requests creates ongoing difficulty for visitors. Again, the expectation that all visitors will provide similar support creates the potential for difficulty for future visitors.

Medical Supplies and Equipment

Medical supplies and equipment are commonly donated by both individuals and institutions. However, the donation of medical equipment may present challenges. Make sure that donated supplies and equipment are requested by the recipient and are appropriate for the setting. (e.g. Clinically useful in that setting, in good working order, correct voltage). Medical supplies should only be brought pursuant to the request of the host institution, with attention to the logistical challenges of importation as detailed below.

Customs and Duty Considerations for Donations

It is not uncommon for medical supplies and pharmaceuticals to be confiscated and/or taxed heavily by customs officials. If you are bringing medical supplies, it is very useful to have the following available for customs officials:

- A letter from a government representative stating that they are aware of the incoming supplies and are interested in having them brought in-country for the purposes of health care at a local clinic or hospital
- A letter from the host recipient (e.g. hospital administrator) stating that they are aware of the incoming supplies and are interested in using them
- Any pertinent information regarding the supplies (eg, instructions, warranties, expiration dates, original packaging, original medication bottles, etc.)
- If applicable, an informational letter from the stateside donor or source of supplies
- Funds available to cover in-country taxes and duty, in case they are still assessed.