



should be documented in the patient record, the position paper recommends.

However, exceptions may arise. A common situation physicians encounter is having an acquaintance or another person they have never examined seeking medical advice from them online. David Fleming, MD, MA, chair of ACP's Ethics, Professionalism, and Human Rights Committee, said during the briefing that physicians should be cautious and respectful of the patient's needs in their response and help direct patients to an appropriate source of care, which may include suggesting they make an appointment. He noted,

though, that if "it is a crisis intervention, we are obligated to take action."

If an established patient contacts a physician online outside a previously established communication route, Chaudhry suggested "it's a great opportunity to have a conversation with the patient about why they want to interact with you online."

Confidential communication should be handled only through secure channels. Fleming noted that nonsecure e-mails or other electronic communications may be viewed by persons other than the patient.

Physicians are also urged to actively manage their online reputa-

tions, by periodically checking what types of information come up in a search for their name and creating a profile page that will likely be the first item to come up in such a search. Fleming noted that online searches may be the first contact patients have with a physician, and sometimes the information they find may be inaccurate or unflattering.

Finally, the paper recommends that physicians be aware their online behavior may have lasting effects on their career. "A comment you have not thought through can take on a life of its own," Chaudhry said. "Be careful what you post." □

Volunteer Corps Aims to Improve Training for Clinicians in Developing Countries

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LIKE MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, Malawi faces a shortage of clinicians to meet the demand for care. According to the World Health Organization, there are just 3 nurses per 10 000 Malawians (compared with approximately 100 nurses to 10 000 citizens in the United States and the United Kingdom) and even fewer physicians, with fewer than 1 per 10 000.

The country lacks the training capacity to build a larger clinician workforce to better meet the demand. To help Malawi and other countries like it grow a robust domestic pipeline for health care workers, a new nonprofit, the Global Health Service Corps, has partnered with the Peace Corps to create a program that will send US clinicians to these countries to help train clinician educators, improve the quality of domestic training programs, and create opportunities for clinicians to pursue specialized training.

"The need is enormous," said Vanessa Kerry, MD, chief executive officer of the Global Health Service Corps

and director of the Global Public Policy and Social Change Program at Harvard University School of Medicine in Cambridge, Mass.

Kerry, who is also the daughter of US Secretary of State John Kerry, explained that many US clinicians would like to volunteer abroad to help build local health systems, but they either don't know how to or cannot afford to participate. She explained that the average graduate of a US medical school

now has \$150 000 in student loan debt to pay off, and many are not able to afford the interest that would compound during a service program.

Through its partnership with the Peace Corps, the Global Health Service Corps aims to address both problems. The organization is offering up to \$30 000 in student loan repayment for clinician volunteers, as well as technical expertise in clinical education, and the Peace Corps is providing its exper-



Nursing students at the University of Malawi Kamuzu College of Nursing observe an instructor demonstrating the use of intravenous fluids. A new program has been launched to send US clinicians to Malawi and other developing countries to help grow a robust domestic pipeline for health care workers.



About the Global Health Service Corps Program

- Physicians and nurses can apply for a 1-year assignment to train nurse and physician educators abroad through the Global Health Service Corps; renewal for a second year may be considered.
- Clinicians are eligible to receive up to \$30 000 a year in tuition reimbursement for participation.
- Physicians with specialization in internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, or psychiatry are being sought.
- Nurses from all disciplines are eligible, but must have at least 3 years of experience; midwives are also eligible.
- Experience in education is preferred.

More information is available online at <http://www.globalhealthservicecorps.org/>.

tise in training, placing, and supporting US volunteers abroad.

“The Peace Corps has incredible experience putting Americans in the field in culturally sensitive and innovative ways,” Kerry said. “We are just building off that.”

The first class of Global Health Service Corps volunteers will begin orientation in July, and in August, groups of 12 volunteers each will be deployed to Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The volunteers headed to Malawi will be working with clinician educators at the University of Malawi, which is home to one of the largest clinical training programs in southern Africa, according to Address Malata, RN, PhD, a nurse educator and principal of the nursing school at the University of Malawi in Lilongwe. In addition to training Malawian clinicians, the school also attracts students from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Sierra Leone, she noted.

Malata said the school lacks the resources to expand enrollment despite a dire need for nurses, physicians, pharmacists, and other clinicians. She explained that nurses at public hospitals often face herculean patient loads, sometimes hundreds of patients per nurse.

“They do long shifts, as well. They are overworked, and many are older,” Malata said. “We have a crisis.”

Given such difficult working conditions in the state health system, many nurses seek better options at nongovernmental organizations or in other

countries, leaving high vacancy rates at public hospitals.

Many Malawians are eager to pursue nursing careers but face a bottleneck at training programs such as Malata’s. She explained that her program last year had 1000 applicants for 200 undergraduate slots. The College of Medicine in Blantyre faces similar constraints, with just 85 slots and limited opportunities for specialization.

Kerry said that the Global Health Service Corps has established goals for each country. In Malawi, the focus will be on improving physician training in family medicine and obstetrics and improving nurse psychiatric training. Malata said the volunteers, who can stay for up to 2 years, will also help with training nurses and physicians and will help train educators at the University of Malawi, including some sent from other schools or countries.

“It’s about quality, not just numbers,” Kerry said. She explained that many clinicians leave not just because of poor working conditions, but also because they lack opportunities for professional growth. She said the program hopes to engage local governments and encourage them to create good working environments and incentives for clinicians to stay in the public system. Malata said that nurse retention is a separate issue that must be addressed, but that the current Malawian president is working to improve conditions for health workers.

“We have one advantage: there is political will,” Malata said. □

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Injection-Free Immunotherapy

A daily dose of allergens under the tongue appears to be effective in desensitizing patients with allergic rhinitis or asthma to respiratory allergens.

In a recent review article, researchers found moderate evidence supporting the efficacy of sublingual therapy. In 8 of 13 studies they evaluated, patients with asthma who were treated with this approach had a 40% or greater improvement in symptoms compared with a control or alternate therapy group. Evidence of efficacy for allergic rhinitis was moderate: 9 of 36 studies showed a 40% or more improvement in symptoms. Although common in Europe, sublingual therapy isn’t approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

<http://tinyurl.com/cnx3jz4>

US Labs Lack Oversight

Federal oversight of high-containment laboratories where researchers study dangerous microbes continues to fall short, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO).



James Gathany/CDC

Four years ago, the GAO recommended implementing a national strategy for oversight, including periodic assessments of the nation’s need for these labs. Now the agency has criticized the president’s Office of Science and Technology Policy for failing to organize a single entity to carry out government-wide strategic evaluation of high-containment laboratories. The labs, which grew in number after a series of anthrax attacks in the United States in 2001, develop countermeasures against deadly biological agents.

<http://tinyurl.com/cwn9obw>

Genetics Influence Smokers

Teens with certain genetic risk factors aren’t more likely to try cigarettes, but if they do, they’re more likely than others without those traits to smoke daily and heavily, a recent analysis shows.

Researchers followed up more than 1000 people in New Zealand from birth to age 38 years to examine whether or how a genetic predisposition to smoking plays out in actual smoking habits. Those with a greater genetic risk who tried cigarettes were more likely than lower-risk individuals to eventually smoke at least 20 cigarettes a day. Genetically predisposed teens who became smokers also were more likely in adulthood to fail attempts to quit.

<http://tinyurl.com/borj2o4>

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