Medical Missions Frequently Asked Questions

Dominican Republic

General Information

Where do medical missions take place?
Primary care missions will split time between our on-site clinic and temporary field clinics set up in the communities (bateys) near our site in the Dominican Republic. Surgical missions take place in our on-site surgery center. Our surgery center, clinic, and volunteer accommodations are located on a property connected to Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH), a children’s home about 45 minutes outside the nation’s capital, Santo Domingo.

What specialties are provided on your medical missions?
During primary care missions, we address acute and chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, upper respiratory infection, musculoskeletal pain, allergies, type 2 diabetes, urinary tract infection, anemia, and skin infections. Providers also assess patients for surgical conditions that may be treated at One World Surgery’s surgery center. During our surgical missions, we provide surgeries and consults in orthopedics, general surgery, ophthalmology, and otolaryngology (ear, nose, and throat).

Do you have a referral system and plan for follow-up care in place?
Yes. One World Surgery has local physicians who provide follow-up care for primary care patients with chronic conditions via home visits. Through our patient assistance program, we also provide financial and healthcare navigation support for patients with urgent needs to access care from the local medical system. Local physicians also perform post-operative consultations in our on-site clinic for surgical patients and can address any complications.

What is the patient population?
Most of our patients come from the communities surrounding our future facility. These communities, called “bateys”, are primarily inhabited by Haitian immigrants and their descendants. Many work in the sugar cane fields, or other manual labor jobs. In 2018, our health promoters performed a needs assessment on nearly 10,000 residents in 2,542 households of the patient population and found the following: 55% had completed less than primary education, 31% had no access to a toilet or latrine, 42% had no access to a health clinic, 46% had an inadequate floor, and 36% had an inadequate roof.

What medical roles are needed on medical missions?
On primary care missions: Primary Care Physicians (family medicine, internal medicine, and pediatrics), Physician Assistants, and Nurse Practitioners are needed. They examine and assess patients, establish a plan for care and follow-up. They may also assist with obtaining patient vital signs or help run the pharmacy. Providers should be comfortable seeing patients with a variety of medical problems. Medical specialists, such as cardiologists, dermatologists, pharmacists, optometrists, and audiologists are also needed. Nurses (RNs and LPNs)
experienced medical assistants, and physical therapists are needed to obtain patient vitals, address chief complaints, and to help run the pharmacy and laboratory. Non-clinical (general) volunteers are also welcome to support medical professionals in taking vitals, registering patients, and working in the pharmacy.

On surgical missions: Surgeons in the above-mentioned specialties, anesthesiologists, CRNAs, surgical techs/surgical nurses, OR circulators, Pre-op nurses, and PACU nurses. We also welcome physical therapists, surgical first assistants, x-ray technicians, EMTs, MAs, CNAs, and sterile processors. Non-clinical (general) volunteers are needed to help prepare food for medical mission volunteers and staff and rotate through support roles in the Surgery Center.

What are the eligibility requirements for medical volunteers?
All medical volunteers should be currently licensed (if required for their profession) and working in their profession with at least 1 year of experience. All medical volunteers must submit proof of their current license and board certification (if required by their profession) in order to practice during the mission. Volunteers who are retired or not currently practicing in the field may serve in support roles.

How long is a medical mission?
Most medical missions are 1 week in duration and take place from Saturday to Saturday. Some missions may end on a Friday or Thursday. Your approval email will contain the official dates.

How many people participate in medical missions?
Most primary care missions have ~20 people. An average surgical missions or combined surgical and primary care missions has approximately 45 volunteers. We can host up to 60 volunteers in our visitor center.

Can my children attend?
Yes! Children ages 16 and up are welcome to attend until the Surgery Center is officially open in 2024; exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis. Please contact medicalmissions@oneworldsurgery.org if you are seeking an exception. Volunteers under age 18 must be accompanied by an adult for the entire duration of travel, including traveling on the same international and domestic flights. Children under 13 must always be accompanied by a nonclinical adult during the mission. If you are a clinical participant, you must bring another adult family member or friend to help supervise all younger children. One World Surgery staff and other medical mission volunteers are not able to provide supervision. One World Surgery allows children 13 and over to walk around the property and participate in general volunteer activities on their own. If you are not comfortable with this, you should bring a nonclinical adult to accompany them.

Please note that some stations have minimum age requirements. Volunteers must be at least 15 years old to observe surgery inside an OR, at least 18 years old to scrub into surgery, and at least 14 to participate in a Community Health project.
Can non-medical volunteers attend?
Yes! They will participate as general volunteers, rotating between different workstations in the surgery center, primary care clinic, or field clinics. Surgery center stations include turning over ORs, washing instruments, taking out the trash, and assisting with administrative projects. In field clinics, general volunteers will support with patient registration, vital signs, and the pharmacy. General volunteers may also participate in Community Health Projects helping to improve the living conditions and communities of One World Surgery’s patients. Projects can include house improvement and renovation to increase home safety and quality of life, in addition to building community spaces like basketball courts and ping pong tables.

Applying for Medical Mission
I don’t have my passport information available or am just applying for a passport. Can I still submit an application?
Yes, in most cases you can still submit your application. If you are a provider, a copy of your passport is required 8 weeks prior to the mission so that we can submit your documentation and credentials to the local ministry of health.

I can’t attend the entire week. Can I still apply for a medical mission?
Due to limited transportation resources and the distance of the airport from our location, we try to limit additional airport pick-ups and drop-offs whenever possible. Additionally, all first-time participants are required to attend the orientation on Sunday afternoon. Please contact medicalmissions@oneworldsurgery.org to confirm if a late arrival or early departure would be permissible. The volunteer is responsible for covering the cost of additional transportation.

I’m not available during your scheduled trips. Can I volunteer another time?
At this time, volunteer opportunities are only offered during scheduled medical missions.

Can I stay for longer than a week?
Typically, we do not have opportunities for volunteers to stay beyond the mission week. Occasionally, longer term opportunities, such as summer internships, may be available. Contact medicalmissions@oneworldsurgery.org for more information.

When is the application deadline?
Applications are accepted year-round on a first come, first served basis. Providers are required to apply at least 8 weeks prior to the trip so their medical credentials can be verified and submitted to the local ministry of health. Applications for other volunteers may be accepted up to 10 days before the trip for critical roles. We recommend applying at least 3 months before the trip to ensure you receive all trip reminders and have adequate time to prepare. Applications for the following year typically open in the summer.
Requirements
Do I need a passport?
For the Dominican Republic, your passport must be valid for the duration of your trip for entry. We recommend passports have 6 months remaining validity (for US passport holders). Your passport must have one blank page for entry.

Do I need a visa?
U.S. passport holders can stay in the Dominican Republic for 30 days without a visa. Participants who hold passports from other countries should confirm requirements with an embassy or consulate.

I don’t speak Spanish. Can I still attend?
Yes, a team of local medical interpreters work with volunteers during every mission.

Cost
How much does it cost to attend?
- Program fee (covers accommodations, emergency medical/evacuation insurance, meals, and ground transportation in the Dominican Republic). If you are an employee of a corporation (such as Optum, Envision, or VillageMD), your program fee may be covered
  - $1000 for first participant
  - $500 for additional family member 18 and over (includes parents, spouses, and your adult children only)
  - $250 for additional family member under 18 (includes your children only)
- Flight costs
- Any additional travel costs (e.g. recommended immunizations, baggage, cost of applying for/renewing passport)

Scholarships that cover program fee expenses may be available; including through OWS (for critical clinical roles), partner organizations, and for members of ASCA and AST. Check out our website https://oneworldsurgery.org/scholarship-fundraising/ for more information.

How much do flights cost?
Flight costs typically range from $500 to $1,400 roundtrip. Flight costs vary depending on time of year, departure airport, and time at which flights are booked. One World Surgery partners with Diversity Travel, a travel management company, to provide access to humanitarian fares which are more flexible tickets and have added benefits, like additional baggage allowance.

Preparing for the Medical Mission
How do I book flights?
Participants are responsible for booking their own flights according to the guidelines found in the trip informational packet. In the Dominican Republic, participants fly into Las Americas.
International Airport in Santo Domingo (SDQ) on the 1st Saturday of the mission and depart on the 2nd Saturday of the mission (unless another day is indicated on your application approval email). Participants are expected to arrive and depart between the hours of 1-4 pm.

What immunizations do I need?
Hepatitis A and Typhoid are the recommended immunizations for this trip, but they are not required.

What to Expect
Where do volunteers stay?
In the Dominican Republic, volunteers will stay in the OWS visitor center located adjacent to the grounds of the NPH Children’s Home and directly connected to the surgery center and clinic. Accommodations are simple, and volunteers will share bedrooms with other clinical and nonclinical volunteers. Due to limited space, volunteers may not be roomed with their spouse, share rooms with other volunteers they do not know, or stay with our local team members.

What is the weather like? How should I dress?
The Dominican Republic has a hot and humid tropical climate with daily high temperatures around 90°F year-round and low temperatures around 70°F. Air conditioning is not available in volunteer accommodations or field clinic locations. Volunteers will be provided with fans in bedrooms and clinics but may want to bring a personal battery-operated fan. Volunteers should dress modestly, as cultural standards in the Dominican Republic are different than those in the U.S. Shorts and skirts should reach to the knee, and straps on shirts must be at least 3 fingers wide. Comfortable, broken-in walking shoes are a must, and light, cotton clothing is recommended. For surgical missions, scrubs will be available. It is recommended to bring close-toed shoes.

Is it safe?
NPH Dominican Republic is located between Santo Domingo (57 miles) and Punta Cana (69 miles). Visitors travel to and from the airport by OWS’s private vehicles, which are operated by OWS’s licensed drivers. NPH Dominican Republic has unarmed security guards that do rounds in the evenings and cover the front gate all day. Emergency medical and evacuation insurance is purchased for all participants. We have never experienced a security incident during a medical mission.

Will there be an opportunity to explore the city or other parts of the country?
Primary care missions will involve trips off-site to provide care in the surrounding communities. Schedule permitting, off-site meals or other activities may also be planned for the group on early days or the last day of the mission. Any travel off-site during the mission must be organized by OWS. All other leisure or tourism activities off-site must take place before or after your mission.
What is the typical schedule?
*Saturday:* Arrive and settle in, tour of NPH Children’s Home, Dinner, General Orientation
*Sunday:* Clinical and general volunteer orientation presentations from local clinical and hospitality team, Optional Mass, electronic medical record and optometry training, Lunch, OWS Site Tour, supply and equipment preparation
*Monday-Friday:* Patient care in central clinic, surgery center, or off-site field clinics/ community health project sites all day. Dinner and programming in the evening
*Saturday:* Depart

What is NPH?
NPH, or Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, is a children’s home with 9 locations in Latin America. Our facilities in the Dominican Republic and Honduras are also located on the property of NPH homes. Visit the [NPH website](https://nph.org) to learn more.

Will we have an opportunity to interact with the children?
Any activities with the children (i.e. games, joining the volunteers for dinner) are scheduled by the local OWS team. It is never appropriate to walk into the children’s homes or school unannounced or to invite children into the visitor center. Those who sponsor a child at NPH can arrange a visit through our local team. Children are in classes during the week and have after-school routines (i.e. homework, chores). We respect these daily routines in order to maintain a sense of stability for the children. Volunteers will not serve as direct caregivers or teachers. These duties are filled by trained, long-term, Spanish-speaking staff for the benefit and safety of the children.

I’m a medical volunteer. Will I stay in the same role the entire week? Will I have the chance to learn a new skill or observe surgeries?
Generally, we have just enough volunteers for each area, and we need to use each medical volunteer for their particular skills. Medical volunteers usually serve in the same role all week and will not have the opportunity to observe surgeries. Because we are committed to providing safe and high-quality care, medical volunteers will only perform skills in which they are trained and experienced. For example, a nurse with primarily PACU experience will not serve as a scrub in the OR.

I’m a pre-med student or a student of another health profession. What will I be doing?
Patient care is only provided by trained medical professionals, and we will never sacrifice patient safety in order to provide a volunteer with a learning opportunity. We also expect all volunteers to participate fully in the service aspect of the trip. Pre-med students and students of other health professions will serve as general volunteers, rotating among different opportunities in the surgery center, including administrative tasks, cleaning the ORs and helping in the kitchen. Occasionally, students may have clinical training and experience (i.e. EMT, CNA) that they can use to contribute to a different role on the mission, such as assisting in pre-op. If your expectation is that you will be able to spend the entire trip shadowing a physician or observing or scrubbing in on surgeries, this may not be the right trip for you.
I'm a medical student. What will I be doing?
Volunteers are never permitted to perform duties that exceed their skills, training, or licensure. Current medical students will be permitted to participate in medical missions in the following ways:

• Shadowing physicians in clinic and assisting physicians, as needed (NOTE: Separate translators will not be provided for medical students.)
• Acting as a scribe for the physician; writing notes from the consult legibly in the Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system.
• Observing/Scrubbing during surgeries (NOTE: Medical students will be required to adhere to all observation policies, including signing up for scheduled observation shifts. Students will only be permitted to perform tasks within their current level of training.)
• Helping the circulators find supplies for the ORs
• **Medical Students who are interested in performing additional functions during the mission may submit a training plan to the Clinical Operations Director for approval. Student volunteers must be attending the mission with a clinical mentor and submit the training plan in collaboration with the clinical mentor.**

Because our medical missions are, above all, service trips that require a team effort, medical students will also be asked to participate in general volunteer duties. If your expectation is that you will be able to spend the entire trip shadowing a physician or observing or scrubbing in on surgeries, this may not be the right trip for you.

What kinds of donations can I bring for the kids at NPH?
Volunteers are welcome to bring commonly needed items such as children’s books in Spanish, clothing and shoes for children of all ages, toys (e.g. puzzles, Legos, board games), sports equipment (soccer, basketball, baseball), materials for therapy (speech, occupational, physical); diapers, and baby wipes. If you would like to bring something more specific, please contact medicalmissions@oneworldsurgery.org to ensure the donation can be used. Please do not bring small gifts or candies to randomly pass out or expensive gifts (i.e. phones, portable speakers). This can create feelings of jealousy and teach the children to expect gifts from all visitors. Donations should be turned in to our hospitality team upon arrival to ensure that they are distributed appropriately.

What kinds of donations does One World Surgery need?
One World Surgery accepts pre-approved donations of goods. All goods must be sterile and safe according to United States standards. Equipment for donation should be fully functioning, include all relevant and associated parts, and ideally come with all an instruction manual.
Contact michael.fry@oneworldsurgery.org at least 40 days prior to your mission for donation approval and any questions so that there is adequate time to submit customs paperwork. Most donations will be transported to the Dominican Republic via volunteers’ checked luggage. Do not attempt to ship anything directly to the DR.
Does One World Surgery need help transporting supplies?
We often need help transporting supplies and medications from the US. Volunteers are asked to reserve a checked bag for transporting supplies if possible. If your help is needed, you will be contacted in advance of the trip by the OWS Supply Chain Manager to coordinate logistics. We appreciate your support!