

MEDICAL VOLUNTEER FAQs

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Q: I am having technical troubles on the site. Whom should I contact?

A: Please email credentialing@operationsmile.org and one of our Volunteer Services Coordinators will be able to help you. Please include your name, medical specialty, and state/country of residence when you email so the correct coordinator can assist you.

Q: What medical specialties do you accept as volunteers for medical programs?

A: Volunteers from the following medical specialties make up our medical program teams:

- Anesthesia: Anesthesiologist/Pediatric Anesthesiologist/Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist
- Biomedical Technician
- Child Life Specialist
- Cleft Surgery
- Dentistry
- Nursing: Pre/Post-Operative, Operating Room, Recovery Room
- Pediatrics
- Pediatric Intensivist/Post-Anesthesia Care Physician
- Speech Language Pathology

Areas such as administration, clinics, OB, Psych and schools generally do not meet our criteria.

We currently do not accept volunteer from the following specialties:

- Dental hygienist
- Dental assistant
- Physician Assistant
- Surgical Technologist
- EMT
- Pharmacist
- Physical Therapist
- Translators

Q: I'm not a medical professional, how else can I be involved and help?

A: We are always looking for advocates to represent Operation Smile and to engage audiences of both medical and non-medical professions! Our ability to assist patients around the world depends on the efforts of many volunteers and donors who raise awareness and funds for Operation Smile. While we might not be able to place you on a mission team, we can use your skills in other ways. You can learn more by visiting <http://www.operationsmile.org/act-now/volunteer>. If you would like to get involved as an advocate for Operation Smile within your community, please contact volunteers@operationsmile.org.

Q: I am not a medical professional. How can I go on a medical program overseas?

A: Unfortunately, we have extremely limited opportunities for international non-medical volunteers to participate on a medical program abroad. Our medical mission teams are comprised of international health care professionals and we use non-medical volunteers in the countries where we work to provide translation and transportation services, assist with on-ground logistics, and to support other administrative needs.

Our ability to assist patients around the world depends on the efforts of many volunteers and donors who raise awareness and funds for Operation Smile. The following are opportunities currently available for non-medical volunteers to benefit our medical programs:

- Operation Smile Student Programs does utilize adult volunteers in a capacity that is responsible for the safety and security of our high school students on missions. If you are interested in this opportunity, our [Mission Training Program](#) is available to eligible candidates. The first requirement to application to the Mission Training Program is to become an Adult Chaperone at our [International Student Leadership Conference](#). In addition to mission Adult Chaperones, we also always welcome adult volunteers at the local level in the USA. To find out if there's opportunities near you, please [contact us](#)!
- If you are interested in community fundraising and service project opportunities to benefit our medical programs, please [contact us](#) and visit <http://www.operationsmile.org/content/community-fundraising-and-service-projects> for more information.

Q: I am a retired medical professional and would like to go on a mission. Do you accept retirees?

A: Operation Smile adheres to our Global Standards of Care and ensuring the safety of our volunteers and patients is of the utmost importance. Therefore, we require our medical volunteers be currently active in their profession. We will accept retirees for up to two-years post retirement as long as the credentials are current and some form of education and applicable work (can be part-time) is continued to maintain clinical competency in the specialty you are applying to volunteer.

Q: I am a credentialed surgeon from the United States but will be moving to South Africa. Can I still volunteer and whom would I contact locally for mission information?

A: Operation Smile is a global organization with Global Headquarters located in Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA and has Foundations and Rep Offices across the globe. If you have moved, please contact Operation Smile Global Headquarters at credentialing@operationsmile.org and we will connect you with the right global staff member to continue your volunteer experience.

Q: I am a dentist and see that a volunteer must have obturator and cleft experience to become credentialed. Do you provide education classes so that I may learn how to work on cleft patients?

A: Our dental volunteers must be able to fabricate obturators for credentialing on surgical missions and at this time we currently do not offer obturator training for international volunteers. Fabrication of obturators means our volunteers must be able to:

1] Take impressions on the patient for the obturator, 2] pour up the models in a makeshift lab they set up themselves, 3] fabricate the obturator themselves, and 4] fit the obturator and adjust it to the patient. There is no defined lab and our volunteers must have the ability to take obturator impressions on cleft patients and have the skills to make the obturator while on the medical mission.

If you are a dentist used to a lab doing the lab work, like retainers, then unfortunately that does mean we are currently unable to accept your application to volunteer.

Applicants from certain countries without obturator experience may be credentialed for dental missions, but please note that presently dental mission opportunities are extremely limited. In recent years our demand for international dental volunteers has decreased significantly due to successful training initiatives for local dental volunteers across our program countries. While it is a testament to our efforts toward increased local capacity, unfortunately it does mean that we are currently unable to accept international volunteer dental applications for dental missions only.

Q: I am a pediatric/anesthesia/plastic surgery** resident; will I qualify for medical programs?

A: If you are a resident in your final year of study of plastic and reconstructive surgery, anesthesia, or pediatrics you may be eligible to apply for our Resident Leadership Program (RLP). This program allows residents to experience a mission under the supervision of a mentor. Please go to our website for more information and to download the application. <http://www.operationsmile.org/content/medical-residents>

*** Surgery Residents: Please note, completion of the RLP does not always lead to immediate credentialing as an Operation Smile volunteer. Our credentialing decision is not solely based on numbers of cleft surgeries or training, but on a multitude of factors. We look at your complete background of education and training, current clinical practice of cleft surgery, and look for a significant amount of experience treating the full spectrum of cleft patients over a wide age range. Acquiring this kind of experience often takes years of clinical practice. If you have any questions about this credentialing requirement upon completion of the RLP, we are happy to put you in touch with the Operation Smile Medical Advisory Council prior to completing the application.*

Q: I am a student and am interested in going on a mission, how can I make this happen?

A: Students are a valuable part of many Operation Smile missions. For more information about becoming a Student Volunteer, please visit our website: <http://studentprograms.operationsmile.org/> or email Student.programs@operationsmile.org

Q: I live near the Global Headquarters. Can I come volunteer there? Can I come visit?

A: Absolutely! Although Operation Smile has a presence in more than 60 countries, not every country or region has an office for local volunteering. Please contact us via telephone +1-757-321-7645 or, email volunteers@operationsmile.org for details to volunteer at Global Headquarters in Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA.

We always welcome visitors, please call 1-888-OPSMILE or 1-888-677-6453 to schedule a time to visit Global Headquarters. Visiting Hours are 9am-5pm local time, Monday-Friday.

APPLICATION AND CREDENTIALING

Q: I'm a medical professional, what is my first step to go on a medical program?

A: If you are a medical professional and would like to attend a medical program, you must first become credentialed as an Operation Smile volunteer. You may review the credentialing qualifications and apply to volunteer on our website here: <http://www.operationssmile.org/medical-volunteer>. If you meet the criteria, complete the online application and upload all applicable documents. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact us at credentialing@operationssmile.org or +1-757-321-3273

Q: How long does the credentialing process take?

A: Each medical volunteer's credentials (application, license, diploma, specialty diploma, board certification, BLS and PALS, if applicable) are reviewed by Operation Smile Global Headquarters Medical Advisory Council Staff. Once all documents have been reviewed and approved, the Volunteer Resources Department will notify the volunteer of the credentialing status and provide further information at that time. This time-frame can take up to four (4) to eight (8) weeks.

Q: I'm currently still working on getting my degree, is it worth starting an application now?

A: Since we do not actually credential our medical volunteers until they have become licensed, there is no way to proceed through the application process without the required document areas being completed. Additionally, we always want the most current information on our volunteers so only partially completing the profile would have us requesting the most current information once the credentialing process began, so we would recommend waiting until you have completed your degree. Please note that the credentialing requirements can be located on our website at <http://www.operationssmile.org/medical-volunteer>.

MEDICAL PROGRAM SELECTION AND INFORMATION

Q: I have been a credentialed volunteer for six months and have not yet been on a mission. How does the mission selection process work? / How long does it take before I am selected to go on a medical mission?

A: In order to promote sustainability in the program countries and longevity in the organization, Operation Smile fills volunteer positions on teams using the follow criteria:

1. Utilizing Local volunteers first in as many positions as possible, then fill open positions with International volunteers. International Volunteer recruitment and placement is approximately 2-3 months prior to the mission. We are striving towards a 4-6 month mission placement process, so thank you for your patience.
2. Keeping a balance of experienced and new Operation Smile volunteers.
3. Inviting potential team members thoughtfully, considering the number of programs he or she has participated in during the fiscal year (July-June) in order to give opportunities to as many volunteers as possible.

This means that, depending on the size of the program, there may be fewer positions available in each specialty for new volunteers.

Q: How much will it cost me to go on a medical program as a medical volunteer?

A: Operation Smile will happily fund the following expenses for your mission:

- Air transportation to/from the mission site
- Ground transportation to/from the hotel and the hospital during the mission
- Lodging during the mission (Note: If a single room is requested and available, the volunteer will be responsible for paying the difference in room price.)
- Breakfast during the mission
- Lunch during the mission
- One mission t-shirt

Each team member is financially responsible for:

- Team fee varies based on the country of residence. There is a flat team fee* for volunteers from the U.S. and Canada:

Volunteer Position	Team Fee
Medical and Medical Records Volunteers	\$500
High School Students and Student Sponsors	\$750
U-Voice Students	\$1500

- \$15 for every additional mission t-shirt ordered
- Travel related expenses: Visas, immunizations, checked baggage, etc.
- Any dinners not hosted by Operation Smile or our sponsors
- Incidental expenses such as souvenirs, airport taxes, personal hotel charges, phones, internet, personal entertainment, etc.
- Any expenses related to extended travel or change in travel dates for personal reasons.

**waived for night nurses and volunteers who have been on 25+ missions*

Q: How will I know what to do once I am confirmed to go on a medical program?

A: Our Global Headquarters Program Coordinator or Volunteer Manager will be in touch with you via telephone and/or email to confirm your placement on a medical program. After the initial contact, they will send you information that will give insight to the details surrounding the medical program. There will be forms that must be read, signed and returned. Volunteers will be advised of the expectations well in advance.

Q: How far in advance do you start recruiting volunteers for medical programs?

A: Operation Smile values our volunteers and their time. For the convenience of all, teams are assembled as far in advance as possible. The recruitment of international volunteers usually takes place two to four months prior to a medical program. However, there are certain protocols that the organization must follow when planning international programs, and although these steps are completed as quickly as possible, they can take time. Operation Smile appreciates your patience and understanding in this matter, and we thank you for dedicating your time to our cause!

Q: I would like to go on a mission with a friend/coworker, is this possible?

A: There are a lot of factors that go into choosing teams for medical programs and we cannot guarantee that you will be placed together with your friend/coworker. We recommend expressing interest in the same mission, however

the likelihood of being able to attend the same mission is relatively low. The team composition is formed by working in tandem with our in-country colleagues; we will utilize volunteers local to the mission country first and then fill available positions with international volunteers. Furthermore, we are continually striving to incorporate new medical volunteers in a systematic way, in order to create a balanced team and provide a positive experience for all new volunteers to Operation Smile.

Q: Does my medical history disqualify me from missions (pregnancy, knee problems, etc.)?

A: Operation Smile is committed to the health and well-being of all its employees and volunteers; as such, we take everyone's health and safety on our missions very seriously. Past medical history and your current status (such as pregnancy) do not disqualify you from mission participation. That being said, we do suggest consulting the following:

- The physician or other healthcare provider who is providing care during the pregnancy
- The most recently released travel guidelines from the CDC for the location of interest (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>)

It is also worth noting that medical oversight occurs via a completed health information sheet before participation in any mission with Operation Smile. Guided by our Global Standards of Care, medical volunteers must be able to work as a team to balance the highest possible quality of care with the efficiency to serve as many patients as our time and resources will allow. This demands stamina – physically, mentally and emotionally – as long hours and a fast pace are expected of our volunteers. Our work also requires travel to locations across the globe, which presents its own set of demands and challenges.

Q: Will mission experience count toward Continuing Education requirements for medical professionals?

A: No, not at this time.

Q: What is a typical schedule for a mission?

A: The typical mission is about ten days long. Based on the country, local hospital commitments, and other factors, this will be adjusted to meet the demands of the specific mission. The “traditional” schedule will include two days of Screening (generally on Thursday and Friday), when several hundred patients will come to be evaluated with the hopes of receiving surgery. The weekend will be used to announce the surgery schedule to the patients, set up the Operating Rooms and wards, as well as to have a Team Day when volunteers have a chance to experience the local area sites and get to know each other outside of the hospital. On Monday, Surgery Week will begin and continue for five full days of cases. After finishing the surgery on Friday, the team will pack up the equipment on Saturday, and have the Final Party (always a fun event) on Saturday night before departing. Again, this schedule should be used only as an example, as missions often vary. The Program Coordinator or Volunteer Manager will be able to provide you with the plan for a specific mission.

Q: Do I have to be able to attend the entire mission?

A: Yes, we need volunteers to attend the full mission to provide the best patient-centered care possible to our patients and their families. On extremely rare occasions, volunteers may attend only for the week of surgery.