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Checklist for Planning International Global Health Travel

The importance of advanced planning

Participation in medical work abroad requires advance planning. You may be dependent on your international partners and their government agencies to complete certain steps. Since this introduces delays outside of your control, it's smart to get started early.

Checklist:

- Learn about the history and culture of the place where you will visit
- Read about the ethics of short-term medical visits
- Prepare for your actual planned activities. This might include preparing talks or gathering other training materials.
- Make sure your passport does not expire < 6 months before you complete your trip.
- Obtain visa.
- If you will do direct patient care, determine if you need a temporary professional license for the country and obtain it with the help of your international partners
- If you will be providing direct patient care, obtain professional liability insurance.
- Confirm and review the international coverage of your own US health insurance plan.
- Obtain travel insurance that includes evacuation for medical or security reasons
- If you will be bringing equipment or medical supplies, determine if you will need customs clearance and obtain it.
- Check with the US State Department for information about the country you plan to visit, including travel warnings and advisories.
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html> Later, enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/step.html>
- Review CDC travel health safety information.
- Visit a Travel Clinic, update immunizations and obtain travel medications.
- Purchase plane tickets.
- Make a plan for how you will communicate when you are abroad (phone and internet)
- Make copies of important documents and information, store and distribute them.

Suggested Timeline

6-12 months prior to travel

- Communicate with partners/hosts to plan your project.
- If there will be research, work on the protocol and determine IRB approval steps
- Do some preliminary investigation:
 - Will you need to obtain a temporary professional license for the country you are visiting? Can your host help you obtain it?
 - Check your passport expiration date. Some countries require a certain amount of time (e.g. 6 months) left on your passport prior to your exit from that country or you will likely not be admitted to the country.
 - Check visa requirements. What kind of visa will you need? For example, you may need a business visa rather than a tourist visa.

4-6 months

- Renew passport if needed. Passports must be valid for 6 months after the date you expect to return to the U.S. Get your passport finalized early so that you can use the updated version to apply for visas and possibly for other steps.
- Start the work to get a temporary medical license if it is required. Work with the host medical organization or university in the country to which you are traveling. This is more commonly required in Africa than in Latin America. It may require sending a notarized copy of your current medical license and possibly other documents which may take some time to assemble.

2-4 months

- For some countries, a customs clearance letter from the appropriate host country's federal agency needs to be in hand for medical items to be taken into the host country. This may require not only the list and amount of supplies but also the cost (if donated, the cost needs to be estimated) to estimate the tax, if any. A customs clearance letter from the appropriate host agency is key to getting supplies into the country and generally takes 2-3 months to process. This often needs to be done in collaboration with host organization.
- Visa. Business visas or some other non-tourist visa may be required for health professionals volunteering their time for medical work. Getting a business visa may require help from your host to provide you with letters or to get approval from their government's agency. Visa information for entry into many countries may be found on U.S. State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country.html>. but may not provide enough clarity for your specific situation.
- A letter of invitation from the host country Ministry of Health or the facility where you will be working can sometimes be valuable when you arrive at immigration. You would need to request this document from your host institution.

- Purchase plane tickets. Tip: tickets to Africa are often cheaper if purchased as a round trip rather than two one-way tickets.
- Prepare any talks or gather training materials. Conversations with hosts will be valuable to targeting the audience correctly, but anticipate making adjustments once you arrive. You may or may not have reliable internet access to help prepare talks while you are there.

1-2 months

- Visit a travel clinic to discuss immunizations, yellow fever requirements, antimalarials, etc. It's smart to do this early enough in case you need a series of immunizations. Review CDC travel recommendations which should be consistent with the Travel Clinic recommendations.
- Consider obtaining a phone which will be compatible with a carrier in your destination country. It can be very handy to get a local SIM card overseas that you can insert into your phone to obtain a local phone number. This is very helpful in communicating locally during your trip, and will also provide an emergency international communication device in case internet is not available. Research the carrier in the destination country to find out if a phone you already own will be compatible and if not, you may want to buy a cheap one to take with you. In addition to being compatible with the local GSM or CDMA bands, the phone must be unlocked. Your international partners can likely tell you if it will be easy to get a SIM card (and one that fits your phone)--as is the case almost everywhere.
- Recheck US State Department Travel Advisory for the country to which you will travel and register with U.S. State Dept. STEP Program (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program). Enter your specific trip into the system.

< 1 month

- Obtain travel insurance (emergency medical, evacuation insurance)
- Obtain professional liability insurance if needed. The broker recommended by GPNW (Gallagher) bundles professional liability and travel insurance together in one policy.
- Scan, photocopy, or record the following:
 - Itinerary with reservation numbers and airline or travel agent contact information.
 - Passport face page and any required visas.
 - Your prescription medication labels
 - Debit and credit card information
 - US health insurance information
 - Travel insurance information
 - Emergency contact information

Experienced travelers print paper copies of most of these things to carry with them, but also prepare for possible loss of the papers by saving copies in the

cloud, giving copies to folks back home, and giving selected information to any fellow travelers.

- Make a plan for how you will communicate with people back home. e.g. WhatsApp (all platforms), Facetime and iMessage (iPhones only). If you do get a local SIM card your local phone number will be a backup option.
- Decide if you will obtain local currency using ATMs or by currency exchange. Even if you will mostly use ATMs you should bring some US currency, and you would be wise to bring an ATM card even if you plan to mostly use currency. Unblock your ATM and credit cards so they can be used overseas. When you obtain US currency, ask for relatively newly issued bills which are more reliably accepted by money-changers overseas who worry that older notes could be counterfeited.
- Submit Waiver of Liability Form to GPNW.

Packing Tips

- If packing medicines, supplies and instruments, have an inventory list of each bag's contents readily available for Customs Clearance, noting which items you will be leaving in the country. Medications should not be labeled as expired or in some cases be within 6 months of their expiration dates.
- Consider taking a headlamp with spare batteries for power outages and a battery pack to recharge your phone during power outages.
- Stash an extra copy of your itinerary and your contact information inside each bag in a way that will be seen if the bag is opened. This can help the airlines identify your bag for you if your bag is lost in transit and the baggage tags get detached (it's happened!).

Items on the checklist for which you might need help from your host or placement organization.

We are grouping these items together to possibly help you improve the efficiency of communication with your host or placement organization.

- Getting a temporary medical license (if required)
- Arranging customs clearance if you plan to bring medical supplies or equipment with you
- Getting documentation to support your application for a non-tourist visa (such as a business visa), if that is required
- Generating a letter of invitation for you to carry with you to help solve any problems at the airport (this is optional and may be completely unnecessary or may be helpful)
- Suggesting or arranging housing
- Help in understanding your options for phone and internet communication. Hosts will likely know if you can easily get a local SIM card for your phone, and they can tell you if there is Wi-Fi at the medical facility.