

Donating Drugs and Medical Equipment

A guide for Volunteers



Many health systems in low and middle income countries are massively under-resourced. Whilst not a permanent solution, individual donations can bridge gaps and support vital healthcare until health systems are strong enough to meet their own needs. For example, currently in The Gambia the Ministry of Health does not have a budget for medical equipment but relies entirely on donations, primarily from governments and institutions.

On the other hand, irresponsible, or poorly considered donations can stretch the resources of already heavily burdened governments.

This leaflet sets out some of the things to think about before you consider donating medicines or equipment, it is not an exhaustive list or set of examples.

The main point to take away is never take anything without talking to the beneficiaries first!

Donations, like all partnerships, should be based on transparency and mutual respect. Never make assumptions based on your perspective on the outside looking in.

What Should I Think About Before Donating?

Need

What does your partner need? It's very easy to sit and assume that you know what your partner wants but have you spoken to them and discussed how you could help with access to medicines and equipment? It isn't always the best to supply medicines and equipment to a partner, especially when the same can be bought locally and cheaply. Talk to your partners, explain that you want to help and listen to their suggestions.

Context

Not all drugs and equipment need the same storage, try to take medicines that don't need refrigeration and with equipment take any extras such as transformers with you, these may be procured much more easily and cheaply before you go.

Do you know if there are the staff there to use the device or drugs you are taking? For example for THET's 'Making it Work' toolkit we heard about a case where an anaesthesia machine was donated to a hospital without an anaesthetist.



Process

A certificate of donation will help with customs clearance and with outlining how medicine should be used. Unfortunately, sometimes donated medicines will end up in private pharmacy or equipment donated to a specific ward will end up as general hospital property.

Make your expectations and intentions clear with a certificate! Paperwork Paperwork Paperwork! Don't just assume you can take whatever you want with you or that you can ship without getting prior



approval. A good start is to contact your Embassy or High Commission first as they may be able to recommend a clearing agent in country who can make the process much smoother!

If you are donating equipment make sure it comes with a user and maintenance manual in a locally used language so technicians can fix it easily and the facility can get more use out of it!

Supply Chain

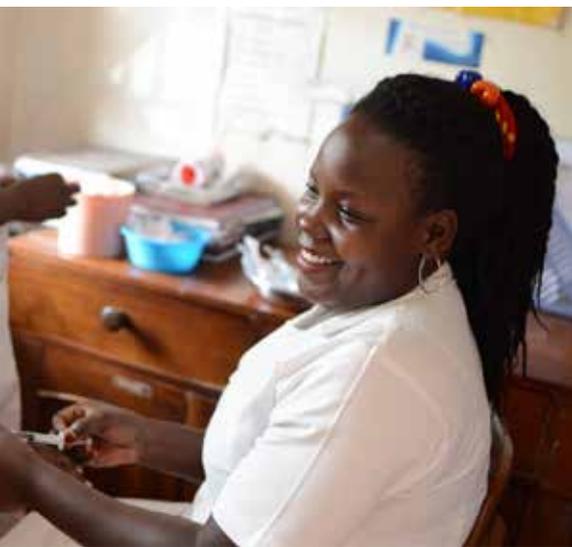
Whether you are taking a piece of equipment or the reagents it needs, make sure there is a sustainable supply of consumables available in country at the right price or the lab might become filled up with equipment they can't use.

Starting a patient on a drug could make the situation worse if they cannot continue to take them after your supply has run out. Donation should never be the sole way a facility gets the medicines they need but properly managed donations can fill the gaps when supply chains break or when health facilities resources are already stretched.

Parity

If it's unacceptable here then it's unacceptable for your partners. You wouldn't give a patient here an expired or returned medicine, nor would you send equipment you knew was broken.

Never collect returned or expired medicine, if you want to source medicine for a partner use a charity like IHP or a not for profit wholesaler such as Durbin.



MORE INFORMATION

- [IHP website](#)
- [PQMD Guidelines for Quality Medical Product Donation](#)
- [THET, Biomedical Engineering Work](#)
- [THET, 'Making It Work'](#)
- [WHO essential medicines](#)
- [WHO priority equipment](#)
- [WHO guidelines on Medicines Donation](#)

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