Tropical Health & Education Trust

MAKING DONATIONS

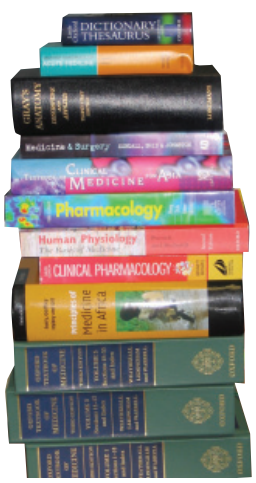
Sending items to your overseas Health Link (Link) partner can be of enormous benefit. It can help to alleviate some problems associated with working in a resource-poor environment. However, if not properly planned or managed, it can prove to be expensive and of little or no benefit to the receiving hospital. It some cases it might also undermine the Link partner's long-term institutional development. Therefore, before sending equipment abroad it is essential to consider the following:

- **Has the partner requested it?** All goods must be agreed upon by both Link institutions, preferably with an initial request from the overseas partner. This will prevent waste, stop local health authorities from being undermined, and guarantee the relevance of the products that are sent. Sending equipment that has not been requested or discussed by the receiving institution can undermine the Link partnership and reduce an institution's stake in its own development. Sorting through unwanted and unnecessary equipment can be extremely time-consuming, especially for a hospital with limited personnel.
- **What are the long-term consequences of sent items?** How sustainable are the items you are sending? Will they undermine long-term, domestic strategies? For example, sending drugs may seem the most natural response to a critical shortage in the partner hospital. It could however create a non-sustainable dependency on the Link, weakening the long-term capacity of the hospital. It may also undermine state-wide efforts to have a drug provided by the country's own health service.
- **Is the item suitable for the partner's requirements?** It is important to consider if the equipment being sent abroad is suitable for the different setting. For example, surge protectors may need to be included to protect valuable equipment from fluctuations in the local electricity grid. Local engineers need to know how to install and maintain the equipment. Spare parts and consumable parts must also be available in the region at a reasonable cost.
- **Is it possible to purchase the item for a cheaper rate nearer the Link partner?** It may be cheaper to purchase items, such as medical texts, close to the partner's own region, rather than purchasing and shipping them from the UK.

WHAT TO SEND?

It is vitally important that partners are consulted over what to send and should make final decisions on specifications and details.

1) Books



Books can be an excellent item to send to the partner Link. Providing that the texts are up-to-date and have been requested by the partner, they can be a cost efficient and valuable resource. Bear in mind that it may prove cheaper to purchase medical texts in Africa rather than buying and sending them from the UK.

2) Drugs and other Consumables

Knowing that the provision of certain drugs could improve or even save lives means that partners in the UK and overseas often consider including the provision of drugs as part of their Link. However, sending drugs abroad can be both practically difficult and ethically unsound. The following information must be kept in mind:

- Why do you want to supply drugs? Will this benefit your partner beyond their immediate use?
- Is the donation sustainable? What will happen when you stop providing them?
- Who are the end users of these drugs? Will they receive these drugs free of charge?

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Drugs & Consumables (continued...)

- How will your donation affect local systems and markets?
- How will this affect the government role of providing for their communities? Have the local authorities been consulted?
- The cost of shipment **all the way to the local partner** should be considered. Getting the drugs through customs can be time consuming and expensive – is your partner prepared to do the necessary paperwork and undertake the required travelling to receive the goods?
- **NEVER** send out of date drugs, or drugs that will become out of date during shipment, unless these are requested specifically by your partners. Sending products that are past their sell by date in the UK is inconsiderate and even insulting.
- Your partner might decide that out of date consumables such as bandages, syringes, sutures, needles, etc, might be appropriate for training purposes where mannequins and other training tools will be used. There may still be restrictions on the import of such items, however, so please ensure that your partner is happy for you to bring or send such items and that it is possible for you to do so.

3) Equipment

- There should be local capacity to install and maintain any equipment provided (trained engineer, for example). Are there affordable spare parts available in the region?
- Ensure that staff are familiar with the type/model of equipment to be donated and do not need specialist training.
- If the equipment uses consumables, can the organisation afford to pick up the revenue cost?
- Check the service specifications of the equipment with the link organisation before shipping – they may not have for example 3 phase electricity supply or steam power.
- Provide surge protectors for valuable equipment (to combat fluctuations in local electricity grid).
- Import duty on goods can sometimes be waived if a donation is for charitable purposes. The paperwork for this needs to be done in advance and your partner will need to do this.

SUMMARY

- **Communicate - The success of a shipment relies heavily on the quality of communications between donor and recipient organisations. Always listen to the link organisation and provide items that they need. Do not send alternatives – they could be a waste of money to ship.**
- **Sustainability - Always consider the sustainability and long term impact of the goods you are sending. What are you hoping to achieve in the long term with what you are sending?**

Sending items abroad can make a long-term impact to institutions in the developing world. It can give dedicated health-workers the tools they need to effectively treat more people.

Ultimately by working closely with your Link partners you can ensure that all of your hard work in organising such a significant logistical undertaking has been worthwhile.

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