

Volunteering in Global Mental Health: A Practical Guide for Clinicians

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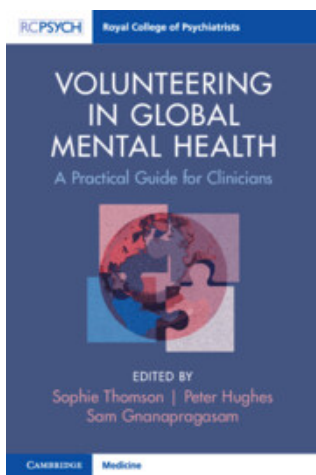
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Mental health, a key to human well-being, plays a large role in the global health burden.¹ *Volunteering in Global Mental Health: A Practical Guide for Clinicians* is a good resource for any global volunteer because mental health can be affected in any population that experiences chronic illness, poverty, discrimination, or humanitarian emergencies. Editors Sophie Thomson, Peter Hughes, Sam Gnanapragasam are psychiatrists from the United Kingdom (UK) who have experiences in volunteering and supervising volunteers in various countries. The book is written for mental health and allied professionals to help them be more prepared and successful in their global health work.

The first section introduces principles and ethics of global volunteering. The second provides a practical guide for volunteering in another country, from knowing what to pack, learning about the food and culture, and assessing the safety of a country to be visited, to conducting and evaluating volunteer programs. The third section includes narratives of volunteers, including perspectives of both trainers and recipients of training programs. The fourth section is a brief discussion on how technology and video communication could be used in the future of global volunteering.

The third section is the most captivating part of the book. Including perspectives of the trainers and the recipients in chapters back-to-back highlights the mutual appreciation of volunteer programs and the subtle contrasts in perspectives of the experience. The narrative style is unique in providing perspectives that would be difficult to gain from other types of literature. For example, Chapter 12 describes the experience of a local trainee when a volunteer in Myanmar is teaching in a small group to not let “negative” experiences with a patient affect you. This comment leads to a disagreement because it contradicts the Buddhist teaching of experiences being “within us,” which strongly influences Myanmar culture (p. 123).

The authors frequently describe their experiences using the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)² to train local providers in primary care settings. The mhGAP and *mhGAP Intervention Guide (mhGAP-IG)*,³ created by the World Health Organization, are excellent resources that aim to narrow the mental health treatment gap in low- and middle-income countries. mhGAP is a composite of more than 90 evidence-based guidelines for the management of mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) illnesses. *mhGAP-IG* provides simplified flowcharts for assessment and treatment of common MNS diagnoses that can be implemented by nonspecialized health workers. A systematic review by Keynejad et al analyzed 162 published articles on the use of *mhGAP-IG*, showing the expanding use of this resources in several countries in Africa and Southeast Asia.⁴

The authors are successful in creating a practical guide for global health volunteers. The chapters are approachable and frequently use checklists to summarize key learning points. This design makes the book easy for volunteers to reference while preparing for an experience or during their trip. At the same time, the description of the experiences and the discussion of the challenges or ethics of volunteering are brief, and more depth

on these topics would have been appreciated. Additionally, some aspects are relevant only to health care clinicians practicing in the United Kingdom. For example, details about how the authors were able to receive approval from employers or training programs to volunteer globally and incorporate the volunteer experience into their work are specific to the training structure in the UK and its National Health Service. That said, most of the tools and guidance provided in this book are widely applicable. This work is a valuable resource for health care professionals, at any stage in their career, who are interested in volunteering globally and lessening the inequity in mental health care.

REFERENCES

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