



**CMF**

Christian Medical Fellowship

**healthserve**

# **preparing for your medical elective**

**IN A RESOURCE POOR COUNTRY**

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#### DISCLAIMER

Christian Medical Fellowship cannot be held responsible for the information contained in this booklet. Students should confirm the information with individual institutions and missions agencies, including the conditions for undertaking electives and the precautions advised to reduce health and transport risks.



# preparing for your medical elective

IN A RESOURCE POOR COUNTRY

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**Appendices are in a separate booklet and are:**

- 1 a useful reading list
- 2 mission agency addresses
- 3 overseas hospital addresses
- 4 other short term opportunities
- 5 ICMDA addresses
- 6 some sources of elective grants



# introduction

This booklet has been prepared by the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF), in order to assist you in preparing for an overseas medical elective. CMF has some 1000 student members and has assisted many who have taken an elective placement in a resource poor country. This booklet is a summation of advice given and lessons learnt by those students who have reported back to us.

CMF can't organise your elective for you and is not a mission sending agency, but we are part of a large network of individuals and agencies that can help you at almost every step of the way. Many of our graduate members are involved in mission situations overseas. In addition, we

also have extensive links with overseas hospitals, UK-based mission agencies and other organisations.

CMF is also a member of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) which has member organisations in over 60 countries (see Appendices).

So if you have questions about the why, where, when and how you should go, or about the practicalities of travel, immunisations, visas and life in another culture - this booklet is a good place to start. It may not answer all your questions but we can probably put you in touch with someone who has those answers.

## **Planning an elective needs careful thought, prayer and thorough forward-planning**

### **Count down to lift off**

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>18 months before</b> | <b>Decide where you want to go and make an approach to the relevant institution or organisation. Check visa requirements and that your passport is in date! Book a place on a CMF Electives Day.</b> |
| <b>9-12 months</b>      | <b>Keep your hosts and the institution/organisation updated. Once you have an acceptance letter, seek financial help.</b>  |
| <b>4-6 months</b>       | <b>Book air tickets and organise travel insurance. Obtain necessary visas.</b>   |
| <b>3 months before</b>  | <b>Organise relevant immunisations. Buy things you will need and any items your hosts have requested.</b>  |
| <b>1 month before</b>   | <b>Obtain malarial prophylaxis and buy Travellers Cheques, if necessary.</b>   |

# why start planning so early?

- ▶ The more popular locations get booked up a year or two in advance
- ▶ Not every overseas hospital will immediately respond to emails
- ▶ Internet connections are often erratic and may be down for extended periods of time
- ▶ 'Snail mail' can take weeks, if not months, for replies to get back to you
- ▶ Your elective enquiry is unlikely to be a priority concern for an overworked, under-resourced hospital administrator
- ▶ It is not usually possible to obtain a travel grant until you have evidence of a firm acceptance, in writing, and grant committees only meet at certain times of the year
- ▶ Without an acceptance letter you are likely to miss out on available funds
- ▶ It can take a considerable time to obtain Visas or other official documentation
- ▶ If your plans fall through, you may need further time left to make alternative arrangements. (It is worth having some alternative plans 'on the back burner' to avoid such disappointment)
- ▶ You may also need time to save some money or put on a fund raising event!

# why go to a resource poor country?

Among the many good reasons:

**1** You will see diseases and advanced pathology that you won't find in the UK. You will probably see diseases that you will not otherwise come across e.g. schistosomiasis, malaria, leprosy and amoebiasis, to name but a few. You will also see more familiar conditions presenting in advanced stages and with clinical signs that you have formerly only read about in textbooks – not least AIDS and TB.

**2** You will gain more 'hands on' experience and in personal self confidence. There will probably be opportunities to assist at operations and undertake procedures, which at home you would, at best, only observe at a distance. The hands-on experience and confidence gained will prove immensely valuable as you prepare for the responsibilities you will face in your foundation years.

**3** Experiencing life in a culture of poverty, you will see UK health problems from an entirely different perspective when you return. Many of the issues we face in the West are simply magnified in resource poor countries. Insights gained in primary health care, disease prevention and epidemiology, resource allocation, training of health workers and patient attitudes to disease can be invaluable in trying to find solutions for similar problems in the West.

You will gain valuable insights and learn to empathise with patients who come from very different ethnic backgrounds. You will gain, first hand, a non-western worldview of health and disease which will cause you to see UK health problems in an entirely different light. An overseas elective will go some way to prevent you developing 'tunnel vision' to world health priorities.

**4** You could gain valuable material for a research project. This is something you will need to discuss with your University and the establishment to which you are going and will entail considerable forethought and planning. Make sure that you have access to the information and resources that you will need to enable you to fulfill your objectives.

### Did you know that..?

- ▶ Over 30 million people worldwide still suffer from preventable forms of blindness
- ▶ Over 30 million people suffer from AIDS
- ▶ Despite being treatable for >50 years, the world is facing an epidemic of TB
- ▶ Over 17 million people die from preventable infectious and parasitic diseases each year
- ▶ Over 5 million children die each year from preventable infectious diseases
- ▶ 529,000 women, one a minute, die during pregnancy in resource poor countries (RPCs)
- ▶ African women are 175x more likely to die in childbirth than those in developed countries
- ▶ The cost of covering AIDS care alone is exhausting the health budgets in RPCs
- ▶ In the UK, we have one doctor for every 629 people. In Mozambique it is 1:143,350

**5 To 'test the water' for future overseas Christian service.** It may well be that God will call you into cross-cultural medical work in a resource poor country in the future. The needs are increasing dramatically. Such an elective will give you a valuable insight into what is entailed and help to dispel any false notions you may have about working overseas.

**6 It will be a life changing experience and you will learn much about yourself and God that you would never learn in a western environment.** You are likely to find yourself in situations that will test you and stretch you - in every direction – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually! In such situations, you will learn a lot about yourself, about the God we serve and the power of prayer.

**7 Finally and most importantly, it is an opportunity to serve the risen Christ.** As our master's story of the Good Samaritan so poignantly reminds us, true Christian love is prepared to put itself at risk, and cross ethnic, social and cultural barriers to minister to another's practical need. Although your contribution may be small in worldly terms, it is nonetheless significant in the eyes of Jesus. If the Son of God was prepared to become a man and die on a cross for our sakes, then as his servants we should similarly be prepared to give our lives in service to him.

## where can I find the answers to my questions?

To some extent it will depend on what you are asking but hopefully, you will find many of the answers in this booklet. There are several possible avenues:

**Other students.** Grill a student who has recently come back from where you want to go. Make use of their experience and learn from their mistakes as you organise your trip. Your medical school should have a file of elective reports written by past students. If you can, make contact and talk to the student involved.

**Visit the CMF overseas website at:**  
*<http://www.healthserve.org/electives/>*

**Surf the net.** Secular sites include *[www.medicstravel.co.uk](http://www.medicstravel.co.uk)* and *[www.electives.net](http://www.electives.net)*

Plan to attend a **CMF elective day** - held each spring in London. You will find details on our overseas website or contact the CMF Office *[laura.risdale@cmf.org.uk](mailto:laura.risdale@cmf.org.uk)* Some University CMF groups organise their own days (or evenings).

Again, please contact us if you would like help to do this.

**Your Medical School** may well organise elective events and should have an archive of student elective reports to refer to.

**Christian mission agencies** (*see appendix* There are over 20 Christian Mission Agencies based in the UK who have established medical work overseas and are willing to cater for student electives.

**Individual hospitals** (*see appendix 3*). A number of established hospitals in RPCs will take elective students. Make sure you reply promptly to their questions and supply ALL the relevant details/papers that they request. Visit our overseas website at: [www.healthserve.org/pages/pages.asp?page=subsection&id=4](http://www.healthserve.org/pages/pages.asp?page=subsection&id=4)

**Read a book on the subject.** See *appendix 1* for a list of informative books.

## when should I go?

**The later in your training the better.** The greater the knowledge and experience base you have before you go, the more you will get out of your elective. You will be a greater help to those you are working with and are likely to be given responsibility. As a result of which, you are going to learn that much more. If possible it is best to go after your paediatrics and O&G attachments, otherwise much of the valuable experience may be lost on you, and you may become frustrated by how little you are able to contribute.

**Certain times of year may be more suitable than others,** depending on your destination, e.g. the monsoon season in Asia or the summer heat of equatorial Africa could make life difficult for you. Consider also the

timing of local national holidays and other events. Seek local advice.

Make sure that the doctor(s) you hope to be working with are not going to be on holiday or out of the country while you are there! You need to plan the timing of your elective carefully and if your dates are set in stone, then choose somewhere appropriate for those dates.

# where should I go?

Write to several organisations, hospitals or clinics that interest you, telling them about yourself, including your Christian background, and spell out your expectations of the elective. Make clear whether the dates of your elective are flexible and can be varied within limits or are fixed and immovable.

You may already have a specific geographical location, project or plan in mind. If not, your choice of location could depend on several factors:

**What type of cultural experience most interests you?** Going to a country where English is spoken (East or Southern Africa, India or Pakistan) will make communication easier. If you happen to speak French or Spanish then certain parts of West Africa or South America may be an attractive option. You may wish to experience life and work in a particular religious culture e.g. Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist.

If you are prepared to take on the challenge, there is value in going to a country where the language and culture are unfamiliar, but make sure that there are interpreters available.

## Did you know that..?

You can find help with translation of some languages for the purpose of completing application forms etc. from:  
[www.altavista-babelfish.com](http://www.altavista-babelfish.com)

**What kind of medical experience** are you seeking? General or specialist, hospital or primary health care, public health or palliative care, or an involvement with a specific disease e.g. HIV, leprosy, malaria.

**What kind of organisation** do you want to work with? Mission, secular or university set up.

**Budgetary constraints?** Don't be limited by finance. If you believe this to be God's will for your elective, then trust him to provide. One good maxim is – 'pray as though everything depended upon God and work as though it all depended on me'. Your current finances might not accommodate long distance air-travel, but give yourself (and God) time by planning well ahead.

**Is it safe?** - Parents (and medical schools) often worry about a trip into the unknown. It is worth checking at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) for government advice on the political situation. HIV and AIDS are also likely to form a major part of your experience and you need to consider your involvement in this area. (see - What about HIV/AIDS?)

## Pause for thought

If God is already calling you into a specific avenue of service then don't play around!  
Make a choice that will help you to prepare further for what he has in store.

# should I go with a friend or spouse?

**With a friend:** Be aware that you may end up living together in very close quarters and you could fall out in times of stress! On the other hand you may feel happier (and safer) being with someone you know than being on your own in a strange land. It is certainly helpful to have someone with whom you can talk over the experiences of the day. You might feel less isolated and lonely and it's always good to have a friendly shoulder to cry on when the need arises!

**With a non medical spouse:** then it will be important to consider what he/she

is going to do during your stay. Most institutions will probably be glad to use his/her expertise but enquire before you go.

Encourage your friends back home to text/email you regularly whether they have anything significant to say or not. News from a far country is like water to a thirsty soul and such contact can be the highlight of your week. Try and find 2 or 3 people who will pray for you while you are away and give them a list of prayer points before you go (and update them regularly if you can).

# how long should I go for?

You are unlikely to gain much of value in less than 6 weeks in any one place. With a shorter stay, the difficulties of adjusting to the new situation will outweigh the benefit and you may well prove to be more of a hindrance than a help to your hosts! Most mission and local church hospitals will not take students for less than 6 weeks. Many grant giving organisations will expect you to be in the one place for at least a month.

Bear in mind that you will probably also want to pencil in time for holiday activities at the end of your stay.



## what next?

Once you know where you are going, find out as much as you can about:

- ▶ The country - politics (both medical and national), religions, history, geography and climate
- ▶ Language and culture - Learn some of the local greetings and customs so that you know how to greet people and avoid causing unnecessary offence
- ▶ Clothes – What should you wear (and not wear)? How formal do you need to be (often more so than in the UK). Do you need to wear a white coat on the wards? What will the weather be like when you are there (do you need hot, cold or wet weather clothing)? What about watches, rings, jewellery? (Remember you may be working among the very poor)
- ▶ Accommodation? If provided – is it self catering or are meals included?
- ▶ Transport - How will you get about? Will you be met at the airport?
- ▶ Mission Policy - Does the mission take any particular line on alcohol, smoking, church attendance or style of worship that you will be expected to agree to?

## what can I expect when I get there?

Healthcare systems in resource poor countries operate under considerable financial constraint and with very limited resources. This means that the priorities in delivering health care and the standards attainable are very different from what you will be used to at home. Disease patterns and cultural attitudes to disease, suffering and death are also likely to be very different. Poverty, poor roads, communications and transport, recourse to traditional remedies and ignorance mean that the presentation of many illnesses is often very late. Sometimes there is little that

can be done. Doctors, because of their isolation and lack of IT facilities, may not have access to regular journals and may even be unaware of recent advances.

It will be a tremendous learning experience. However, do not expect to be given systematic teaching. In most RPC hospitals there is not time to discuss fully all the pathology that comes before you. Hopefully you will get regular teaching input but you can take textbooks to read and there are always occasions for talking things over (e.g. while assisting at ops etc), but expect to have to read and forage information for yourself.

**If you are shocked by the way you see medicine practiced or the way 'missionaries' live, don't be overly critical.** Quietly observe and try to work out why things are done the way they are. Don't be afraid to ask questions but remember you are a GUEST and should behave accordingly. It is not your job to put people or things 'to rights' even though it may be tempting to try and do so. It may well be that changes are called for in the system. It could also be your lack of local knowledge and/or your attitude that needs to change!

You can be a stimulus and a joy to colleagues who may have very little time to think of change. Go with a Christ-like servant attitude. If you maintain a flexible approach and go expecting a challenge and are keen to make the most of the opportunity to learn and serve in a new culture, it will be a life-changing experience for you and you will find that you get much more out of your elective than you put into it.

## how much will it cost?

Much depends on your destination and the time of year that you have to travel. Surf the net or visit your local Travel Agent. By far the major cost will be the airfare.

As an approximation, the total cost of your elective is unlikely to be more than twice the cost of the air-fare. Don't expect any financial assistance from within the country you are visiting.

Your hosts should be able to tell you about local costs. Some organisations/hospitals include accommodation and/or cost of food within the charges they quote. Check carefully what is on offer. Food and accommodation within the host country is usually much cheaper than in the UK.

Don't forget to include the costs of visa, airport taxes, travel insurance, immunisations and malaria prophylaxis in your budget.

### Food for thought

**God's work done in God's way never lacks God's resources.**

*Hudson Taylor, China Missionary and founder of OMF*

## how can I raise the finance?

The Dean of your medical school should have details of any grants, scholarships and bursaries for which you can apply. It is worth approaching several grant-making trusts rather than attempting to raise all your support from one source, both because most trusts are happier to give small grants and there may be several who would be interested in what you are planning.

Some useful grant making agencies are listed in Appendix 6 and on our website at [www.healthserve.org/pages/pages.asp?page=subsection&id=28](http://www.healthserve.org/pages/pages.asp?page=subsection&id=28)

Keep your applications brief and to the point, include a brief CV and indicate where and what you are planning to do (a map helps), your motivation for going, the nature and aims of the project you have in mind, the organisation and persons you will be responsible to, what you hope to give and gain in experience. Include an itemised list of expected costs. A well-presented single sheet of A4 is more likely to receive a reply than a 99 page thesis. The inclusion of a research project often increases your chances of an award.

**Use your initiative.** Be creative. Don't just consider your own needs, include projects your hosts are involved in that you could raise money for. Members of the public are always willing to give to a good cause. Be bold and publicise such events well. There may well be

others willing to help you including parents, friends, your local church or denomination, even your old school.

**Pray** –If this is God's plan for this stage of your life, then expect him to act. Again, it has been said that we should pray as though everything depended on God and work as though everything depended upon us!

While you shouldn't hesitate to apply for grants if you lack resources, if you already have sufficient money in the bank don't begrudge using it on such a valuable experience. You may otherwise be depriving someone of funds who is less well off than yourself.



# what immunisations will I need?

Some countries in Africa and South America demand documentation to prove that you are covered for yellow fever, and a few demand an HIV certificate. Be sure of the facts before you leave the UK rather than discover them at some remote border post! Check with the appropriate Embassy website.

**WHO** provide very detailed guidance on travel health on their website: [www.who.int/ith/](http://www.who.int/ith/)

**InterHealth** - situated in London and a Christian Agency linked to CMF provides:

- ▶ A customised list of immunisations, antimalarials and health equipment needed for your journey. They will also provide the immunisations and drugs at a reasonable cost
- ▶ Information sheets on the major health problems, including AIDS
- ▶ Advice by phone, letter, e-mail or fax on health related problems at any time before, during or after your time abroad

Contact: 020 7902 9000 Fax: 020 7928 0927 or email: [info@interhealth.org.uk](mailto:info@interhealth.org.uk)

**Be aware:** Two or three visits may be necessary to complete the recommended schedules of immunisation and this takes time. Unless these jabs are offered free by your Medical School Student Services

you are likely to have to pay for them on the NHS.

As a general rule, anyone travelling to a resource poor country should be up-to-date with the following:

- ▶ **Polio**  
an oral dose needed every 10 years
- ▶ **Tetanus/Diphtheria (low-dose)**  
repeat injection needed every 10 years
- ▶ **Hepatitis A**  
one dose covers for one year, a second for 20 years
- ▶ **Hepatitis B**  
a course of 3 injections if not already immunised. Check your antibody titre after the course. If already immunised - a booster dose may be necessary
- ▶ **Typhoid**  
ideally as a single typhim Vi vaccine
- ▶ **BCG**  
if Tuberculin negative
- ▶ **Rabies**  
usually 3 injections

For certain countries, you will also need to be covered for the following:

- ▶ **Meningitis A and C (or quadrivalent meningitis vaccine)** 1 injection
- ▶ **Japanese encephalitis**  
usually 3 injections at days 0, 7, 28
- ▶ **Yellow fever**  
1 injection lasting 10 years

# what about malaria?

This is a complicated issue because resistance is increasing and all prophylactics have side effects. In practice therefore advice needs to be customised for your particular placement and you will need specialist health advice. WHO provide up to date information on their websites. Look at [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241580364\\_chap7.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241580364_chap7.pdf)

Malaria is becoming much more common and dangerous. Avoid all risks as far as possible. Advice on malarial prophylaxis is continually changing – seek up to date advice before you go.

## After your return to the UK

- ▶ Continue to take antimalarials for the recommended time after your return
- ▶ Make sure that you report any suspicious symptoms for at least 3 months after return
- ▶ Don't delay seeking advice. If you should develop a febrile illness in the year following your return, ensure that your

doctor knows if you have been living in a malarial area

## Key messages include:

- 1 Ensure that you take the recommended drug, at the recommended dose, for the recommended time – before, during and after your return!
- 2 Take every precaution to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

- ▶ Sleep under permethrin impregnated bed nets (taken with you if need be)
- ▶ Use a DEET-based insect repellent
- ▶ Spray your room each night
- ▶ Keep well covered - wearing long sleeve shirts and long trousers in the evenings etc
- ▶ Make sure your accommodation is fitted with netted window and door screens
- ▶ Avoid marshy places and going out at dawn or dusk unless really necessary

## Did you know that..?

The commonest cause of morbidity and mortality among expatriates overseas is an RTA

# what about HIV/AIDS?

## Safe practice and safe behaviour are the key to avoidance.

- ▶ Assume all patients could be HIV positive and act accordingly
- ▶ Make sure you know the universal precautions to take if injury/contamination occurs
- ▶ Take such precautions, as far as is possible, if such incidents occur
- ▶ Assume that all blood and body fluids are potentially infective and take necessary precautions
- ▶ Ensure you wear gloves and wash your hands after patient contact
- ▶ Think of taking a personal supply of surgical gloves with you so that you can double glove
- ▶ Take a visor or spare pair of glasses to protect your eyes
- ▶ Beware of contaminating any open cuts you might have
- ▶ Take every care to avoid needle stick injuries

- ▶ Refuse blood transfusion - unless a dire emergency and you know the donor is HIV free
- ▶ Take a course of anti-retrovirals with you. They are usually available from your student Occupational Health Department
- ▶ Make sure the drugs are in date and that you know how to use them
- ▶ Don't be paranoid but do take every precaution

## Post exposure prophylaxis for occupational exposure to HIV

- ▶ Follow normal UK protocols, as far as possible
- ▶ Establish the status of the source patient, if at all possible
- ▶ Start taking ARVs within 2 hours of any high risk injury, if possible, and continue for 28 days
- ▶ Seek UK advice as to whether you should return home sooner rather than later

## Did you know that:

The BMA offers a student elective insurance policy to its members, that includes cover for needle stick injury. See what is on offer at:  
[www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/jointheBMAstudentmembership](http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/jointheBMAstudentmembership)

## other health and safety matters

The FCO website of the UK government contains a wealth of travel advice and is worth a visit.

*[www.fco.gov.uk/servelet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029390572](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servelet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029390572)*

The WHO site provides a useful list of contents for a basic medical kit and advice on other health matters - [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241580364\\_chap1.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241580364_chap1.pdf) As a minimum, you should include plasters, cotton wool, scissors, tweezers, paracetamol and aspirin tablets, antiseptic cream, anti-diarrhoeal tablets & some oral rehydration salts, thermometer, insect repellent, emollient eye drops, sterile needles and syringes. It would be useful to have a supply of surgical gloves with you for emergency use, e.g. involvement in attending a RTA.

Take a plentiful supply of any personal medications (and remember the generic name in case of need). Girls - take enough tampons to last 3 months. If you wear glasses or contact lenses remember to take a spare pair and your prescription.

Drink only water that has been boiled or water/drinks from unopened commercial bottles. You might consider taking a water filter with you. Be careful with ice and ice creams and only eat food which you have either seen

freshly cooked or prepared yourself. Avoid salads/fruit that you haven't seen washed. Eat only fruit that you have peeled yourself. Drink plenty and take extra salt on occasions in hot climates. A wide brimmed sun hat and some sun screen are essentials in tropical sunshine.

Avoid swimming in lakes or rivers unless you know they are free of schistosomes and crocodiles! Keep your feet covered. Find out from the locals about any risks peculiar to the area, and how to deal with and avoid them - snakes, leeches, tumbu fly, spiders or scorpions. Rabies can be a serious hazard. Don't handle strange animals. Wash any bites thoroughly with soap and water, check on the vaccination status of the animal and see a doctor - asap.

Avoid travelling after dusk, as far as you can, and wear a seat belt if at all possible. Never resist violent theft. Keep abreast of the local and regional political scene in the media and be aware of the local laws and attitudes to alcohol.

BUT - don't be put off! These things are all part of the challenge. The local people have to cope with them all the time. They would find a London street a nightmare - it's all a matter of perspective! You will very quickly adapt to the new situation.

# passports and visas

- ▶ Make sure your passport is valid for at least 6 months beyond the end of your proposed trip
- ▶ In most situations a tourist visa (rather than a work visa) will suffice but requirements vary

Check on the website of the UK Embassy or High Commission of your host country for up-to-date information on what you will need.

- ▶ Some countries are not represented in the UK and visa applications will need to be made to overseas consulates
- ▶ It is useful to have the address

and telephone number of the British Embassy in the country to which you are going. This, along with addresses of overseas consulates without London offices, can be obtained by contacting the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, website:

*[www.fco.gov.uk/serolet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029395231](http://www.fco.gov.uk/serolet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029395231)*

Your travel agent or mission agency should also be able to advise on visas and even arrange application on your behalf. Allow at least 2 months for the relevant documents to be processed and returned.

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

It would be worth scanning the important bits of your passport, including the visa, and emailing them to yourself AND always carry a photocopy of the front and back pages of your passport and some spare passport photos with you in case the original is lost or stolen (can be useful for other documents too).

**Don't keep the photocopies and spare photos together with your passport!**

# travel and insurance

If you have to travel at peak times or in school holiday times, you will need to make plane reservations well in advance (also more expensive at such times). Generally the earlier you book the cheaper the seats will be, but there may be less flexibility about changing the dates later. Shop around.

The usual luggage allowance is 20 kilos plus hand luggage. Excess luggage charges can be hefty so it's best to travel light. A backpack might be more useful than a suitcase. It is wise to limit yourself to what you can carry yourself. You will always be able to find someone to help

you but not infrequently your bags will disappear with the helper.

It is advisable to have medical insurance covering accident, sickness and emergency repatriation (see note on BMA student elective insurance package mentioned above). It would be worth obtaining a European Health Insurance Card if you will be working in a country within the EU. [www.ehicard.org/?gclid=CKPM-cWpyYgCFThhMAodyE\\_VBw](http://www.ehicard.org/?gclid=CKPM-cWpyYgCFThhMAodyE_VBw)

Banner Financial Services Group Ltd. provide advice on travel insurance [www.bannergroup.com/index.htm](http://www.bannergroup.com/index.htm)

## before you set off and on arrival

**Make sure that your hosts know when and where you will arrive and that you know whether or not you will be met. If you have to make your own arrangements to reach your final destination make sure you know how best to do this before you leave the UK. It's scary being totally in the dark (sometimes literally!) on arrival in a strange place where you can't speak the language or understand the signs.**

### Some further do's and don'ts

- ▶ Be security conscious at all times and take sensible precautions
- ▶ Never resist violent theft
- ▶ Never carry packages for other people through customs

- ▶ Never sit in anyone else's car when crossing a border or going through customs, always get out and walk
- ▶ Never leave your bags unattended, even in a locked vehicle
- ▶ Keep valuable items to a minimum
- ▶ Carry as little cash as possible and use traveller's cheques where possible
- ▶ Keep credit/debit cards to a minimum
- ▶ Carry all these things and your passport in a money belt under your clothing

**If you get into these habits early you'll find that they very quickly become routine.**

# extras worth taking with you

**For those you are visiting:** Ask if there are any books or equipment you can bring with you. There may be a project you can raise money for as part of your elective “project”. There may be other ‘essentials’ that are difficult for your English hosts to obtain – such as chocolate or Marmite! Some airlines will allow you excess baggage if you are taking a gift to a charitable organisation. Check it out.

**TALC (Teaching Aids at Low Cost) Website:** [www.talcuk.org](http://www.talcuk.org) They sell textbooks, CDs and other teaching aids (very cheaply) which you can read/use and then leave with your hosts.

A free copy of the **CMF Developing Health CD** which contains a wealth of information on practising medicine in a resource poor country and includes management protocols and power point presentations. It would be intended for you to use in preparation for your elective but to leave behind with your hosts on your departure. Available from: [Laura.Risdale@cmf.org.uk](mailto:Laura.Risdale@cmf.org.uk)

**For your personal use:** Obtain a copy of the CMF Publication, *Elective Life Support*. It contains 8 weeks of daily readings and meditations intended for students on elective placements overseas. It is written by students and graduates with overseas experience.

A pocket general textbook such as the *Oxford Handbook of Medicine* and/or

*Tropical Medicine* and a copy of the *BNF* can be invaluable. Not all mission hospitals will have a medical library so enquire about what they do have available. Are there any journals you could take?

Do take and keep a journal/diary of all that you do – both medical and otherwise. Expect God to speak to you. Record his words and your thoughts and answers to prayer.

Other items that might prove useful include: a good torch, a penknife (don’t carry on your person or in your hand luggage on the plane) and a plug adaptor. Pictures of home can act as a useful conversation starter. Biro, coloured pencils, rubbers and other school stationery are gold dust to children with few school resources. A skipping rope may provide your only form of exercise! Don’t forget gifts for your hosts and new found friends (calendars make good presents) and perhaps some thank you cards.

Unless you are a very keen photographer, it’s best to avoid large lenses that attract unwanted attention. Do be culturally sensitive about taking photos and ask permission where necessary.

Consider leaving any books, journals, Bibles, teaching materials that you have taken with you.

# is there anything else I can do to prepare?

**CMF runs an Elective Day** in London each year. The speakers include doctors with a long experience of work in resource poor countries and students who have recently returned from an overseas elective. This really is a must, even if your timetable means you have to go a year before your elective starts. See [www.healthserve.org/electives/edays/default.asp](http://www.healthserve.org/electives/edays/default.asp)

**Make time to pray** about your trip. Remember that you are an ambassador not only for your country and medical school, but for Jesus. Your attitudes

and behaviour will influence your host's attitude towards receiving future elective students. Don't ruin it for those who will come after you. Be prepared to make compromises to keep the peace. Your behaviour must be exemplary, especially if you are going together with a student of the opposite sex. Go with a humble and teachable attitude; that way you will learn far more. You will learn a lot about yourself, your faith, what it means to be involved in mission and possibly even some medicine!

# what can I expect when I get home?

## On your return to the UK, remember to:

- ▶ Continue to take anti-malarial medication for the recommended time after your return
- ▶ Consider taking time out to reflect on what you have learnt – perhaps going on a retreat?
- ▶ Expect 'reverse culture shock'. You will have changed
- ▶ Expect an emotional roller coaster of mixed feelings including guilt, anger, frustration
- ▶ Don't expect everyone to want to hear about your experiences but do share them with those who will

listen and encourage others to go

- ▶ Make sure you spend some time with a trusted friend or counsellor who is a good listener and with whom you can talk through any negative issues raised by your time overseas
- ▶ Keep any promises you might have made - to your hosts, friends and yourself
- ▶ Get back to your hosts and others who have helped you and say thank you
- ▶ Send a copy of any report or research project you write up to your host hospital/mentor

- ▶ Continue to pray for your new friends, the hospital and the country you have left behind
- ▶ Remember the things you have seen and heard and that God might have said to you, and do keep any promises you might have made to him
- ▶ Continue to follow through on what God might have called you to do in terms of a commitment to serve Him overseas after you have qualified

## final check list

**Have you reconfirmed your arrival times with your hosts?**

**Do you know whether, where and when you will be met?**

**Do you have a contact telephone number for use in emergencies?**

**A final check list of things to take with you**

Tick them off before you go

- ▶ Passport and Visa
- ▶ Copies of the same
- ▶ Spare passport photos
- ▶ Some local currency
- ▶ Credit card
- ▶ Traveller's cheques
- ▶ Air tickets
- ▶ Insurance documents
- ▶ Immunisation Certificates
- ▶ Travel details
- ▶ Let hosts know these details
- ▶ Check that you will be met on arrival
- ▶ Clothes
- ▶ Toiletries
- ▶ Sun creams/glasses/hat
- ▶ Travel adaptor
- ▶ Anti malarial tabs
- ▶ Other personal medications
- ▶ Spare glasses/contact lenses
- ▶ Course of prophylactic ARVs
- ▶ Surgical gloves
- ▶ Eye protection
- ▶ Bible
- ▶ Books to read
- ▶ Medical books – including *BNF*
- ▶ First Aid Kit
- ▶ Torch
- ▶ Gifts
- ▶ Thank you cards
- ▶ Mobile phone charger
- ▶ Camera (spare SD Card)
- ▶ Spare batteries





