

What to do when a student says: *“I want to go abroad to get experience”*

This page summarizes the content found in the Educating Students section of the GAPS Toolkit. Be sure to refer to the website for more information and resources.

Talking points:

You need to be aware that seeking “experience abroad” can raise issues of patient safety.

To protect the safety of patients, you should never provide care for which you have not:

- Been sufficiently trained
- Been given the authority to do so by the legal system of that country

You should **not** provide direct patient care, including testing, diagnosing, or treating patients.

(The only exception is if you have reached that level of training in a health profession program and are licensed or working under the direct supervision of an appropriate licensed health professional.)

You need to make ethical choices.

- Traveling abroad to provide medical care as an untrained individual is unethical and unsafe
- Your learning experience should not cause harm or stress to patients or the hosting community
- Admissions committees are looking for students who have engaged with patients in ethical and appropriate ways, **not** those who provided untrained medical care

Begin by choosing an ethical program.

- Look for a program where you are a learner, not provider
- If you provide care for individuals beyond your scope of training, it is dangerous, unethical, and potentially fatal for your health profession aspirations
- Look for programs that follow the [Forum on Education Abroad standards and guidelines](#).

When abroad, avoid unethical situations.

- Make sure the providers and other employees in the volunteer setting abroad know your level of training (they may assume that if you are in college, you are in medical school)
- Make sure that the patients understand your appropriate role
- Talk to other students in the program about the ethical, legal, and safety issues of providing patient care without training

Develop important global health competencies

- Look for programs that offer significant cultural integration to increase your cross-cultural skills
- Learn as much as you can about the broader context of health and the social systems that support health
- Appreciate the culture of the country you are visiting and the differences
- Avoid negative comparisons and inaccurate assumptions about the quality of care in the country you are visiting, based on the physical structure, available technology, and other factors that may be irrelevant