



Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness in the Delivery of International Health Care

Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive/negative, better /worse, right/wrong. In other words, it simply means that you are aware that people are not all the same and that you recognize that your practices or culture are no better than any other.

By being *culturally aware* in the medical field, one can understand and appreciate the social skills that allow providers to work and treat individuals from cultures other than their own. It involves a mindfulness and acceptance of cultural differences, knowledge of a patient's culture, and adaptation of skills, as well self-awareness of one's behavior in that particular surrounding.

Why is *self-awareness* so important during an international medical trip? Once you have been accepted onto a medical mission trip with GFR, you immediately become a representative for what GFR stands for- international medical service. With international medical travel comes the responsibility of respecting the various cultures you will interact with during your GFR medical mission trip. Being mindful of the way you dress and the way you socialize/ interact with locals and those from your team are important factors in projecting a professional image. Therefore it is not only essential, but expected, that each person traveling with GFR will uphold the same values that the GFR team considers essential for a successful medical mission trip:

- Respect of the local custom(s) and culture(s)
- Being aware of one's own behavior and conduct
- Understanding that participants are serving as representatives of GFR.

Communication through cultural understanding and respect of patients is essential in providing appropriate health care. Every health care encounter provides an opportunity to have a positive effect on patient health and relations. GFR participants can make the most of this by learning more about the culture of the region they will be traveling to.