

EDITORIAL VIEWS

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An A.S.A. Overseas Teaching Program

AT THE TIME of the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in October 1989, the A.S.A. House of Delegates approved sponsorship by the A.S.A. of a new and exciting outreach program. Entitled the Overseas Teaching Program (OTP), its objectives include recruiting A.S.A. members as volunteers to teach in established anesthesia training programs in undeveloped or developing countries that, for economic reasons, are unable to realize their full education potential. When all medical expenditures may come to but one dollar per person per year (and there are many such countries), teachers of any type are hard to find. They are even harder to support internally.

OTP will also, of course, give members of the A.S.A. the opportunity to help others in gravely disadvantaged nations and, in the process, broaden their professional and personal horizons by living and teaching anesthesia in areas far removed from their usual practice at home.

OTP, supported both by the A.S.A. and grants from other sources, has been approved for an initial period of 5 years, starting January 1, 1990. It is dedicated exclusively to teaching in delivery suites, operating rooms, and patient care areas, as well as in lectures and seminars exclusively in pre-existing, structured anesthesia training programs in undeveloped or developing nations. Specifically excluded are activities involving primary responsibility for anesthetic management, except insofar as this may be transiently necessary for teaching purposes. Similarly excluded is teaching on a casual, unstructured, part-time basis while primarily involved in patient care during anesthesia and surgery. By specifically emphasizing and

restricting activities to teaching, OATP will complement, not compete with the many other worthy national and international overseas anesthesia programs in similar areas that are designed to provide direct patient care with or without teaching.

The first year of OTP will be occupied by publicizing the program, recruiting volunteers, identifying appropriate overseas participating programs, and establishing necessary administrative support. In the second year, volunteers will be assigned to one of what, in the third year, will become two overseas programs. In the third, fourth, and fifth years, OTP will supply each of two programs with OTP teachers for 12 months each year, *i.e.*, 24 teaching months per year. Volunteers will be encouraged to sign up for 2, 3, or even 6 months, but will be required to agree to be on site overseas for a minimum of 1 month. OTP will thus involve 16 to 24 teaching volunteers per year, depending on how long each one stays overseas.

Students in overseas programs with which OTP will become affiliated may be paramedical personnel or physicians, whomever the nation involved has decided should be taught anesthesia. Paramedical personnel as students in such programs may already have undergone 2-3 years of training as medical assistants before practicing, usually in the bush, as medical assistants for an additional 2-3 years, after which, if they have done well, they qualify for advancement by entering a 1-2 year anesthesia teaching program. Physicians as students or as teachers in anesthesia training programs may be scarce in countries that may have only one physician of any type per 200,000 of the population. There is at least one country with 26 million people and no M.D. anesthetists. There is another of the same size with two M.D. anesthetists.

OTP will not sponsor U.S. teachers traveling from one country to another to lecture at national or regional meetings. An OTP-sponsored volunteer already engaged in teaching for a month or more in this program could,

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however, participate for a period of a few days in a regional or national meeting in the country in which he or she is working.

Applicants for participation in the OTP must be licensed physicians, eligible for examination by or certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology, residents of the United States, and members of the A.S.A. Volunteers will be selected on the basis of information provided in application forms, in letters of recommendation, and, when possible, in interviews.

Volunteers can be male or female and of any age. They can come from private practice or from teaching university departments. Emphasis will be placed on personal and professional maturity. This will include realization that volunteers must teach in terms (of drugs, equipment, techniques) that are relevant to the country involved, forgetting completely how things may be done back home. Volunteers must also be willing to fit in with the program and policies established by the person in charge of the program and not go off on their own. Volunteers must be able to sense and be willing to accept the nuances of local customs and restrict comments and remarks solely to teaching anesthesia. Gratuitous comments on local politics, poverty, civil rights, class distinction, bribery, behavioral standards, etc., are out of place. Volunteers are guests invited to teach, not to express their ideas of social or political right and wrong. English will be the language of educated persons in the countries in which OTP will operate, but applicants will be urged to learn as much as possible of the native language. Credibility of teachers is greatly enhanced if it is evident they have at least tried to learn the local language.

Financial support of volunteers will include round-trip economy class air fare and ground travel between the volunteer's home and the site of the program to which he/she has been assigned. While every effort will be made to have the local host teaching program, institution, or country contribute all or at least a part of living expenses, this may be impossible, in which case a modest per diem for living costs will be provided. The amount will be determined on an individual basis depending on the site, the country, and what, if any, housing and meals may be supplied by the host country/program. Volunteers should expect spartan, non-Western living conditions, however. Volunteers will be prepared and advised on teaching and

living in the country to which they are going before they leave by volunteers who have already worked there.

The effectiveness of OTP volunteers will be monitored by contacting each volunteer and the director of the host program to which the volunteer was assigned after the volunteer returns home.

Availability of this program will be publicized by, in addition to this editorial, flyers and advertisements directed to the A.S.A. membership. It is hoped that an information booth or a workshop in teaching anesthesia in developing countries may be available at future annual October meetings of the A.S.A. In the meanwhile, those wishing more information and application forms may address letters to OTP at the A.S.A. headquarters in Park Ridge, Illinois, but only after March 15, 1990. Descriptive materials and applications will not be available before then. And please, no phone calls to OTP in Park Ridge.

Any and all established, structured anesthesia training programs in any developing or under-developed country already recognized and approved by local governments, ministries of health, etc., are invited to apply for assignment of OTP teaching volunteers. Overseas programs applying for inclusion in OTP will be asked to include a written description of how their local program is structured, who is taught, how many people are taught, their qualifications, the duration of the curriculum, what it consists of, and who presently does the teaching. Applying programs will also be asked to provide a written statement from their government saying that the government is aware of and approves the presence of OTP volunteers working in their country. Availability of OTP to help overseas teaching programs will be publicized in relevant countries by writing directly to established programs known to OTP committee members with relevant overseas teaching experience in anesthesia. Overseas programs can apply directly by writing to OTP in care of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, 515 Busse Highway, Park Ridge, Illinois 60068, after March 15, 1990.

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