

HEALERS ABROAD: AMERICANS RESPONDING TO THE HUMAN RESOURCE CRISIS IN HIV/AIDS

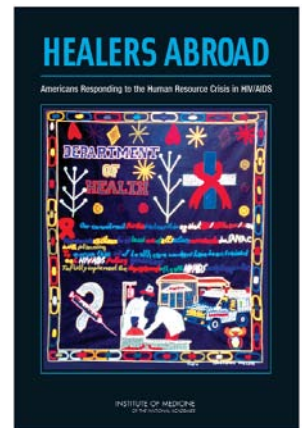
Today HIV/AIDS is one of the world's greatest health crises. Nearly 40 million people are infected with HIV, and 95 percent of them live in resource-poor countries. It is imperative that the federal government create and fund an umbrella organization called the United States Global Health Service (GHS) to mobilize U.S. health care professionals and other highly skilled workers to help fight HIV/AIDS in hard-hit African, Caribbean, and Southeast Asian countries. This GHS will help ensure the success of the President's initiative for AIDS relief to these countries.

The establishment of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has made medicines and other therapies available to persons with AIDS in the 15 PEPFAR focus countries: Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guyana, Haiti, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia. But there are not enough workers to administer the medications and provide other needed support to prevent HIV infection and care for vulnerable persons in virtually all of the PEPFAR focus nations.

CREATING A UNITED STATES GLOBAL HEALTH SERVICE

In the report, *Healers Abroad: Americans Responding to the Human Resource Crisis in HIV/AIDS*, the Institute of Medicine committee recommends that the federal government create a six-part Global Health Service (GHS) with the following elements:

- 1. Global Health Service Corps:** Full-time, salaried professionals would make up the organization's pivotal "service corps" to work side-by-side with other colleagues already on the ground to provide medical care and drug therapy to affected populations while offering local counterparts training and assistance in clinical, technical, and managerial areas.
- 2. Health Workforce Needs Assessment:** Placement of GHS Corps members in PEPFAR countries will be based on an assessment of health workforce needs early in the process. These assessments would generate a baseline inventory for all mobilization programs and subsequent evaluation activities.
- 3. Fellowship Program:** This program offers competitive awards of \$35,000 annually to provide incentives for skilled professionals who want to make a difference overseas but are stymied by financial and logistical barriers. Prospective fellows would commit to at least one year of service providing health care, training, or technical assistance in a PEPFAR focus country. Selection for this program should be considered a major career achievement.



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4. Loan Repayment Program: Eligible participants must serve at least one year in a PEPFAR focus country. Participants could exchange \$25,000 of educational debt for each year of service. Given the heavy student-debt load of many health professionals, this incentive would expand the overall pool of candidates.

5. Twinning: Bilateral arrangements, known as “twinning,” could strengthen institutional workforces in host countries by providing staff to fill vacancies and offering specialized training and development opportunities. Twinning offers smooth, quick transfers of talented people to the identified focus nations while also fostering innovative, long-term partnerships between relevant institutions based in the United States and in PEPFAR countries.

6. Clearinghouse: A clearinghouse would provide comprehensive information about various groups that mobilize health professionals to work in the PEPFAR countries. It would include a searchable, Internet-based directory of programs, an electronic job bank related to service in targeted countries, and information about cultural and logistical issues.

SUMMARY: AMERICANS RESPOND

The six proposed programs will help citizens in the 15 PEPFAR countries overcome the single greatest obstacle to meeting their health care needs—a skilled workforce. In this way, Americans will be doing their part to assist resource constrained nations in coping with the AIDS pandemic. But humanitarianism and showing compassion abroad are not the only benefits of investing in the GHS. Like the Peace Corps, the GHS will foster relationships and multicultural understanding overseas. It will facilitate new knowledge, experience and public awareness of other cultures and bolster the United State’s understanding and ability to respond to many infectious/tropical disease threats that result from a global world. The GHS will counter gender vulnerability through education and other AIDS prevention strategies; and it will support geopolitical security by decreasing the HIV transmission rates in military populations as well as protecting orphans and vulnerable children from the ravages of AIDS.

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Healers Abroad: Americans Responding to the Human Resource Crisis in HIV/AIDS is available for sale from the National Academies Press, 500 Fifth St. NW, Washington, DC 20001; call (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3313 (in the Washington metropolitan area), or visit the NAP’s on-line bookstore at www.nap.edu. For more information about the Institute of Medicine, visit the IOM home page at www.iom.edu.

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