

## DEFINING YOUR PROFESSION

*Principles, expertise and service  
that bind us together*

# Medical philanthropy creates global community

The Global Health Initiative (GHI), a project that started with a single patient gift, has sent 154 medical students to 18 countries, helping countless underserved patients and inspiring new careers as well as philanthropic endeavors.

In early 2008 a patient asked how he could make a charitable donation to honor his physician. In a matter of months, this initiative was born.

The GHI is now a philanthropic, non-profit organization created and operated by Chicago Lake Shore Medical Associates (CLSMA), a multispecialty private practice that comprises more than 45 physicians. In its first year the group raised more than \$225,000. In its second year the total was \$300,000, despite the economic recession.

Back in 2008, when it all started, the nearby Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University was about to open the Center for Global Health to provide an opportunity for students to study abroad and serve in low-resource countries, among other things.

CLSMA physicians, much like the grateful patient whose gift made the GHI possible, had a desire to honor and give back to their medical school. And the two ideas converged.

CLSMA physicians use the GHI to support the center and raise money through their patient population. The charitable mission is to help the professional development of medical students by promoting a global health education, providing aid to low-resource countries around the world and encouraging an interest in primary care medicine.

Students apply for funding through the medical school, and a panel of CLSMA

physicians reviews the applications. Funding covers the cost of travel, food, lodging, program costs, visas and immunizations.

During their first and fourth years of medical school, students travel the globe studying with medical faculty and bringing basic medical care to places such as Africa, India, China, and Central and South America.

Whether they are gone seven days or up to eight weeks, students call the trips life-changing experiences.

A recent survey shows that 95 percent of the medical students who traveled with GHI funding say their experiences motivated them to continue to pursue global health educational experiences to serve people in need.

Because the first year of fundraising was an overwhelming success, physicians expanded the GHI to keep up with student demand and provide year-round funding. In two years the GHI has funded more than 154 medical students at an average cost of \$2,800 per student.

"Few if any medical schools in the United States have the capacity to fund international travel for medical students, most of whom are already managing significant debt," says Russell G. Robertson, MD, director of global health education and services division for the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. "The ability of Chicago Lake Shore Medical Associates' Global Health Initiative to cover travel and some associated expenses creates the opportunity for career-changing experiences for our Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine students."

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### Positive effects

“Helping the medical students, and in turn the medical school, has greatly benefited our practice,” says Robert J. Havey, MD, president of CLSMA and the GHI board of directors. “Doctors are often stretched for time each day seeing a heavy schedule of patients. They don’t have the opportunity to interact with one another very often. Having a shared charitable mission brings the practice together. It gives us a reason to unite and collaborate for the greater good.”

Supporting a charitable cause that has a direct impact on the practice of medicine creates excitement, builds community within the practice, brings doctors closer to their patients and allows the staff to feel that they are also contributing globally, he adds.

The nonprofit work of the GHI provides an opportunity for patients to join with their physicians in a vital cause. Donations have come from patients with longtime connections to their doctors, as well as those who are relatively new.

As every physician knows, day-to-day patient care can be exhausting, especially in a busy private practice in a

major metropolitan area. Having a relevant charitable mission helps provide a sense of balance to the rigors of medicine. On days that are particularly challenging for a doctor — from insurance headaches and reimbursement issues to missed appointments and patient compliance issues — it is rewarding for physicians to know they are having a global impact, Havey says.

One student who returned from a trip to Central America remarked on the power of compassion. She noted that when medical students and faculty bring medical aid, recipients are profoundly touched that people from another country travel to serve them.

And positive effects intertwine: High-impact philanthropy such as the GHI builds international goodwill abroad while helping to inspire doctors worldwide, Havey adds.

The medical community in Chicago encourages and supports the GHI’s work by donating and attending fundraising events.

“Most area practice managers are aware of the GHI and are fairly amazed that we have been able to find the time and make the effort to undertake this type of work,” Havey says.

“The work of the GHI expands the idea of community within and outside the practice to the four corners of the world. The charitable work of the practice has helped differentiate CLSMA from other private medical practices, mainly because it speaks to the identity and vision of the practice.”

Initially, GHI provided a way to support the professional development of young doctors and raise awareness of the medical school’s new Center for Global Health. But, surprisingly, it has also proven to be a good recruitment tool. The nonprofit work of the GHI serves as a marketing asset for the medical school and CLSMA, Havey adds.

### Developing the model

The establishment of GHI, which started as a volunteer effort, would not have been possible without support from the leadership and an efficient use of resources. The vision for the GHI evolved from reflective decision-making that considered physicians’ relationships with patients, sensitivity to how and when charitable support was requested, planned growth and effective communication.

The GHI advisory board evaluated what it would take to engage in a variety of fundraising efforts that would appeal to a number of demographics. While the practice initially decided to attempt to raise funds from a relatively small group of patients, over time the GHI has quickly built a strong community of givers — patients, staff, physicians, private foundations, the corporate world and pharmaceutical companies. 

### How to form a medical practice charitable organization

- Define a charitable medical mission.
- Identify leadership and voluntary participation of physicians.
- Engage your patient population for support.
- Develop tracking system(s) for donor database and establish an accounting system.
- Apply for 501(c)3 nonprofit status from the IRS.
- Plan fundraising events with demographics in mind.
- Strive to identify and diversify new sources of support.
- Evaluate response and adapt.
- Remember: Sensitivity and thoughtful acknowledgment enhance donor relationships and ongoing giving.