Pathology Services in Developing Countries

To the Editor.—I have long been interested in medical services available in developing countries, but particularly pathology. Therefore, I was delighted to see the articles by Benediktsson et al1 and Cagle2 in the November 2007 issue of the Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine.

I had a small part in the initial development of the philanthropically oriented organization Pathologists Overseas. Its first project was to provide pathology services to the mission hospitals of Kenya at a very low cost with 2 pathologists rotating monthly. I served twice (1 month’s duration each time) during this development phase. After the service had shown its value, and the volume was sufficient to make a permanent location desirable, it was moved onto the campus of a mission hospital that was more or less centrally located. That occurred in April of 1995, and it was thereafter known as the AIC Kijabe Hospital Pathology Service. I served at this location 9 times. The initial roster of volunteer pathologists developed by Pathologists Overseas was substantial and included physicians of all religious faiths.

Since the remarkable success of Pathologists Overseas in Kenya, that organization has provided pathologists for several other locations around the world and would welcome additional volunteer pathologists.

The Pathology Service at Kijabe Hospital is very active and signs out about 6000 cases annually. Tissue specimens are brought to the Kijabe Hospital in formaldehyde by a reliable courier service from the 40-plus mission hospitals of Kenya. Occasionally, specimens are received from other countries, such as Somalia, Sudan, and Gabon.

My short-term “stints” of service have been personally very rewarding. The location on the eastern escarpment of the Great Rift Valley is spectacular; the weather is generally pleasant, as the campus is located at an altitude of about 7200 feet, the accommodations are very comfortable, and the mutual professional and interpersonal relationships among long-term and short-term personnel are exceptional.

It is without reservation that I highly recommend short-term volunteering in mission hospitals for active or retired pathologists. This can be done through several organizations. The 2 with which I have had excellent experiences are listed below. There are without doubt others that provide equally excellent opportunities for similarly rewarding and desirable experiences.

“In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”
Matthew 25:40 (KJV).

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