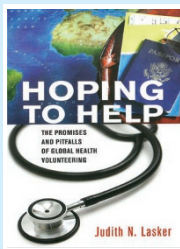


## BOOK REVIEW



### HOPING TO HELP: THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF GLOBAL HEALTH VOLUNTEERING

Judith N. Lasker; 2016  
Cornell University Press; Price \$19.95 pp 272  
ISBN 9781501700095

Think all voluntary work is good? Think again. *Hoping to help*, a roughly 250 page paperback that will fit easily into most hand/man/beach-bags, aims to explore the fascinating (and often overlooked) issues surrounding the growing phenomenon that is global health volunteering. It attempts to answer key questions, such as what types of short-term projects do the most good, how can we best allocate our finite human and financial resources, and perhaps above all, 'who benefits' from such endeavours?

This book is highly relevant to all healthcare professionals, particularly students considering an elective overseas, or dental professionals thinking about using a couple of weeks of annual leave to 'help others' abroad.

'Volunteerism almost always involves a group of idealistic and privileged travellers who have vastly different socio-economic statuses vis-à-vis those they serve', claims Ossob Mohamud, a Somalian blogger quoted in the book. He asserts that 'the

developing world has become a playground for the redemption of the privileged souls looking to atone for global injustices by escaping the vacuity of modernity and globalisation.' Wow. Yet sadly, there may be some truth in this. Don't we all know volunteers whose primary motives have been personal: to boost their CV, practise skills in a more forgiving environment, or realise some personal goal? This book questions the paradigm that volunteerism is universally a good thing, showing some schemes to have ulterior motives (eg preaching the good news), some which don't help those whom we hope to help, and some that actually do harm and inhibit self-sufficiency.

'It would be an awful shame if they were put off' though, as Sam Blackledge, a UK reporter also referenced in the book, says. So before you reconsider your plans, know that many projects do indeed greatly benefit those who they aim to, and have lasting positive impacts in the right places. The book guides us towards the features we should look for when picking our programme.

The publication is a triumph of social analysis and commentary, which rigorously appraises and summarises the existing body of evidence on the topic. At times lengthy and repetitive, overall it is a deeply compelling read that will give you plenty of food for thought, and perhaps change your plans, practice or even your life. I would wholeheartedly recommend it.

A. E. Jones