



INFORMATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

Thank you for joining us on an upcoming trip. Here is some important information for your review prior to travel. If you have any questions, please direct them to Frank Brightwell, Director, at 301-941-1255 or fbrightwell@hotmail.com. Physicians may also want to communicate directly with Dr. Michael Keegan, our Medical Director. Mike can be reached at mtkeegan@hotmail.com. Dentists may also want to communicate directly with Dr. Michael Kaminski or Dr. Andrew Cobb, coordinators of our dental clinic. Mike is at mjkaminski@verizon.net and Drew is at andrewcobb.dds@verizon.net.

How We are Different

There are many wonderful groups doing good work in the Dominican Republic and around the world. We are different in some important ways, and these differences are also at the core of our mission. From the start, we knew we wanted to commit ourselves to *one* community, to reach out to the people there, and gradually to the people in the surrounding countryside. And also from the start, we have worked alongside our Dominican brothers and sisters. We make all our decisions with them; we are mindful to respect the dignity and integrity of the people we serve. We live with the people we serve, and about a dozen people from *Naranjito* work with us each day the clinic is open. We have become a part of the life of *Naranjito*, and the people living there have become an important part of our lives as well. *How* we serve—with compassion, patience, and a sense of humor—is perhaps what truly defines our volunteers.

We treat all who enter our clinic, working from early morning and into the evening to accommodate as many patients as possible. There is no cost to anyone. Medicines are provided at no cost, and we give a supply that will last until our next visit. And each person also receives a supply of vitamins. Occasionally we encounter patients we cannot help in our clinic, and for some of these patients, our program funds completely, even including transportation, their treatment in *Santiago*.

Somos Amigos Medical Missions is neither a religious nor political organization. Although we usually have a prayer or reflection before every meal and participate in the community's religious celebrations (strictly optional), the program welcomes participants of all faiths and backgrounds. The program does work closely with the Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic.

What to expect: Clinic

We typically see 800-900 patients in three and a half days. We have community members help to control the people waiting for the clinic, but lines tend to form very early for appointments and people are around all day. It's unlikely we will encounter many (if any) emergency-type situations. We operate the clinic Monday (set-up Sunday afternoon and early Monday morning), all day Tuesday and Wednesday, and through lunch on Thursday.

Patients for the physicians enter our intake area and have their records retrieved (most of our patients are returning patients). We usually have nurses working in the intake area where vitals are taken, and lab work (blood and urine) is done on certain patients depending on their history. Patients wait their turn for a physician, and after the consultation, the patient waits at the pharmacy window. Our physicians also have access to an ultrasound machine, an ECG machine, and other instruments to test hearing and lung capacity. Women are given the option of a more thorough gynecological exam and pap smear. PAP specimens are sent to a lab in *Santiago* upon our departure, and results communicated to the patients when they are available.

Our pharmacy is very well stocked. We have volunteers counting pills, filling prescriptions and explaining medications to patients.

Patients for the dental clinic enter the intake area and have their records retrieved (again, most of our patients are returning patients). Our hygienist(s) offers a complete cleaning for each patient, and then the patient is directed to the appropriate dentist for treatment. On most trips we are able to offer restorative work, oral surgery, and endodontics. On most trips we are also able to make dentures.

In all areas of our clinic, **we follow universal precautions for the prevention of transmission of communicable illnesses**. Gloves, masks and hand sanitizing lotions are readily available throughout the clinic. We have autoclaves for the cleaning of all instruments.

New volunteers usually notice right away the camaraderie of our group; many volunteers return trip after trip, some for many years. While the work is difficult and the days are long, we do enjoy each other's company and have fun when it's appropriate. Having said that, it is important to recognize that we operate a "real" medical and dental clinic. Our patients put great trust in us and in our care, and some of them struggle with serious illnesses; most face great hardship in their lives. We strive to maintain a professional, respectful environment in the clinic. Each volunteer, regardless of background and experience, plays an important role. Work tasks are assigned based on experience and language ability. Flexibility, patience and a willingness to help in any way necessary are key.

Living arrangements

Volunteers live with a Dominican family in their home. Each person has her/his own bed with a mosquito net. Volunteers have access to a single-spigot-type shower; expect cold water but an otherwise fine, private shower, in the house or attached to the house somehow. Many of our hosts' homes have toilets, but some families still use an outhouse, which they call the *sanitario*. Some homes accommodate two volunteers, others accommodate as many as ten or twelve. Our volunteers have been living with the same families for many years.

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Food and Water

The program provides purified water for refilling water bottles. The group has all of its meals together, with food purchased and prepared under our supervision. The diet is simple and typical campesino. Expect lots of rice and beans, salads, chicken, plantains, root vegetables, and fresh fruits. Lunch is the big meal of the day, but breakfast and dinner are also substantial. There is always plenty of good food! The Dominicans drink a lot of strong, sweet coffee served in small cups, and at night we often enjoy a *tizana*, or herbal tea, made from local plants. Both are fine to drink because the water is boiled. Our cooks have been preparing the food for our volunteers for years. While vegetarians have generally found the diet to be acceptable, we are usually not able to accommodate special dietary requests.

Pre-trip medical preparations

Most volunteers will not need any immunizations for the trip. If you have not traveled to the Dominican Republic or any other developing country in the past few years, you may want to consider getting a typhoid vaccine, as it is recommended. A Hepatitis A vaccine is also recommended. Check to be sure that your tetanus vaccination is up-to-date as well. If you have a question about immunizations, check with your physician, or feel free to contact Dr. Michael Keegan (mtkeegan@hotmail.com), the program's lead physician, for advice. You'll have to make your own arrangements for whatever immunizations you need.

The program will provide the malaria pills that volunteers should take, although each volunteer has to make arrangements for getting the pills in person from either Mike Keegan or Frank Brightwell. Volunteers who are not in the immediate Washington, DC, San Jose, CA or Seattle areas may have to get their first dose of malaria pills on their own, and then they would receive the remaining doses in the D.R. You begin taking the pills one week before the trip and continue taking them for four weeks after the trip.

The greatest health risks in the Dominican Republic come from exposure to the intense sunshine in the Caribbean and eating or drinking what you should not. Both of these risks can be avoided almost completely: follow the guidelines for what to pack, and you should not have a problem with the sun (we are inside most of the time anyway), and all of your food and water will be provided. Everyone is encouraged to keep his/her hands clean with the soap and water and anti-bacterial hand sanitizer that will be readily available in the clinic. None of our volunteers has ever encountered serious medical problems as a result of participating in the program.

Passports and Documentation

A valid passport is necessary for the trip. A tourist visa is also required for entry in the Dominican Republic and has to be purchased (\$10) upon arrival there. If you are a citizen of a country other than the United States or Canada, please check with the Dominican Embassy in Washington regarding documentation, and let Frank know.

What to Pack and Bring with You

As best we can, the *Somos Amigos Medical Missions* group respects and follows the customs and practices of the community with which we live. Our patients and hosts will usually be wearing their best clothes at the clinic and when they are with us. **Please plan on dressing comfortably but modestly. Gentlemen should plan on long pants and lightweight shirts, ladies should plan on skirts or pants and blouses/shirts. (Shorts should not be worn by men or women at the clinic.)** If you can bring items that are all cotton, you will probably be more comfortable, and if you get wet, your clothes will dry faster. Blue jeans are usually not comfortable because of their heavy weight and the amount of time they require for drying if they become wet. Many of our healthcare volunteers find hospital "scrubs" to be very comfortable. You won't be able to launder clothes while in the D.R., so plan accordingly.

Besides your clothing for the five days, you should bring the following:

- comfortable, durable shoes– the area is hilly and rocky; a good pair of sneakers would work fine. *Don't bring open shoes for daily use.*
- a hat
- a sweatshirt or light sweater (especially recommended on the January trip and/or if you are prone to being chilly)
- a rain poncho
- a sleeping bag or small fleece blanket for volunteers on the January trip only
- personal medications and toiletries and a small mirror (have meds appropriately labeled)*
- extra pair of glasses if you wear glasses (sunglasses for traveling)
- sunscreen*
- a pillow-case and one or two towels (although your host family will also likely provide these items)
- a flashlight with **extra batteries**
- an alarm clock (battery or wind-up)
- a water bottle (a squeeze-type water bottle you can get at a grocery store is fine)*
- a camera with an extra battery
- insect repellent*
- some volunteers bring baby-wipes
- some volunteers who are light sleepers appreciate having ear plugs

*When packing, keep in mind airline and TSA regulations regarding what you can and cannot carry onboard (liquids, etc.).

Bags/Luggage

When possible, volunteers are asked to use a soft-sided duffel bag to carry belongings (as opposed to a hard-sided suitcase); this is more for ease of transport in the Dominican Republic. Airline and Dominican Republic customs regulations at times prohibit you from carrying boxes. Airline baggage allowances and restrictions are always in flux, and each volunteer should check with his/her airline before the trip for guidelines.

Depending on the time of year, embargoes are placed on baggage going to the Dominican Republic, meaning that over-sized and/or over-weight bags cannot be transported. Again, check with your airline for details. Most volunteers should need only one bag and your carry-on.

The only people who should be carrying medicines and/or medical and dental supplies for the clinic are the volunteers who have been identified in advance. Some volunteers are asked to carry a second checked bag containing medicines or clinic supplies.

Money

You will need very little money on the trip. If you have \$50 in your pocket, you'll be fine—bring it in smaller bills. Besides the \$10 tourist visa, most people probably spend less than \$20. All of your food and water and transportation will be provided by the program. The exception would be for alcoholic beverages you might want on the first and last nights while we are at the hotel.

Gifts

It's understandable that volunteers will want to express their appreciation to the people they meet and with whom they are living. Our program has always taken the position that our most valuable gift is ourselves. A photo or two from your home would make a treasured memento to leave with your family. Unused toiletries at the end of your stay are also appreciated. It is usually awkward to leave anything else of greater value, *please don't leave money*. Ask if you have questions.

The First Twenty-Four Hours

Our volunteers typically travel from several cities in the U.S., and for most, the travel day is very long. We will spend the first night in the D.R. at a hotel near the airport in Santiago. Upon your arrival in the Dominican Republic, you will be met at the airport and you will be taken to the hotel. After everyone has arrived and is settled, we will have dinner together at the hotel. On Sunday morning we have a brief presentation, followed by introductions. We then travel by bus to Naranjito, arriving in time for their religious celebration in the chapel and lunch. The afternoon is spent organizing the clinic, and there is an orientation for new volunteers.

The Last Twenty-Four Hours

On Thursday afternoon, after inventory and some packing in the clinic, volunteers board the busses and return to Santiago. Again we stay in a hotel for the night before the return flights home. We have a nice dinner together and enjoy each others' company as we share stories from the week. Flights back to the U.S. are scheduled for Friday.

Safety and Security

Our volunteers have worked alongside and lived with the people of *El Naranjito* for nearly fifteen years. I have the utmost confidence and trust in them. Our program is designed with the safety and security of our volunteers in mind, and we have tried to anticipate most of your needs. In the end, however, each volunteer is responsible for himself or herself. You should not put yourself in a situation in which you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. As you would on any trip abroad, especially to a developing country, use your common sense, ask questions of those who are experienced, and never travel alone—use the buddy system.

Emergency

In case of emergency, volunteers can be reached by calling the program's Dominican cell phone. The number is 809-264-9222. *Please*, emergencies only! On the reverse of the release form you will be asked to submit, you are asked to provide an emergency contact for you while you are away. We also have a satellite phone at the clinic, for use in emergencies and in case the cellular system is not accessible.

Fund-Raising

Our success depends on the generosity of lots of people and organizations. If you know of businesses, foundations, civic or church groups, individuals, etc., that would be interested in our work and that might be approached for assistance, please let me know. Every little bit helps.

Why do we need money? The program purchases most of our medications, supplies and equipment. We have money budgeted to provide for the medical care of patients we cannot treat. The group's transportation and food in the D.R. is costly. The budget for each trip is in the tens of thousands of dollars, and we rely on the goodness and generosity of many to make each trip possible.

Remember that *Somos Amigos Medical Missions* is recognized by the IRS as a tax-exempt non-profit corporation. The value of contributions to the program, whether cash or gifts-in-kind, can be deducted for donor income tax purposes. If you need additional information describing the program please let me know.

If you have any questions not addressed here, please call or email. Thank you for your interest and support.

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You can "see" Naranjito and our clinic by entering these coordinates into Google Earth: 19° 19' 12.93" N and 71° 04' 54.19" W.