

Pharmacists Prioritising People in Poverty: Development of the SHPA Aid and Volunteering Special Interest Group

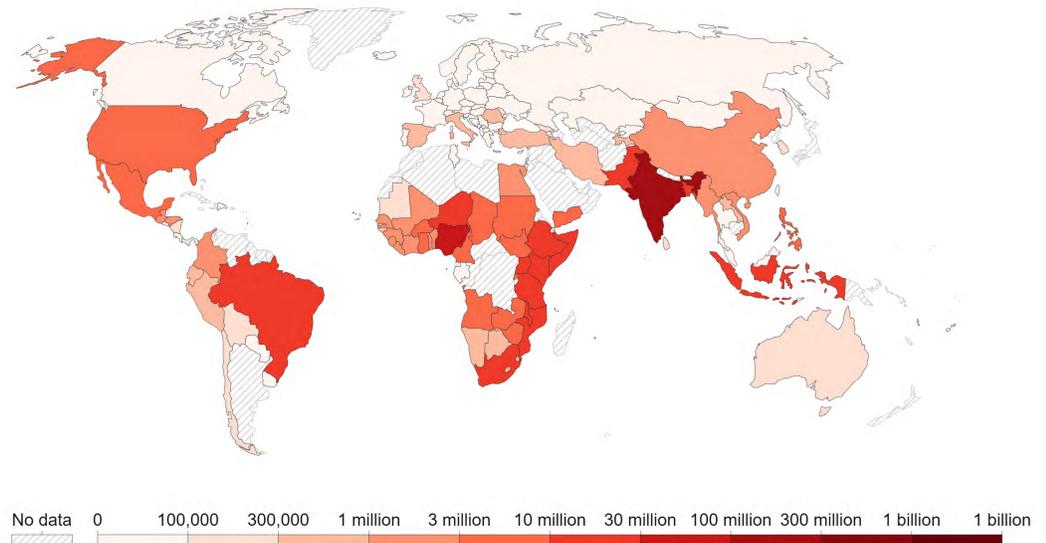
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Number of people living in extreme poverty, 2019¹



Background

As pharmacists, we often share a common attribute of “care-giver” and eagerly seek opportunities to help others in need. However, aid and volunteering need careful consideration. Voluntourism, where unprepared travellers conduct charity works, can have harmful effects. Therefore, collaboration is imperative to ensure sustainability and ultimately enable a greater impact in the sheer extent of global poverty.

Objective

To prevent voluntourism and create a space for pharmacy staff to share experiences, resources and advice in aid and volunteering.

Action

A working committee was established, and with guidance from federal staff of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists Australia (SHPA), a proposal was provided to SHPA for consideration of a new specialty practice stream. An expression of interest was advertised to members and resulted in the development of a new special interest group (SIG).

Working Committee

Proposal to SHPA

Expression of Interest

Development of SIG

Advertising & Recruitment to SIG

Evaluation

This group has grown from 27 to 97 SHPA members with an online discussion forum currently exceeding 16 posts. Recent accomplishments to highlight include a published manuscript as well as fundraiser for the Kingdom of Tonga after devastating natural disasters.



Tips from Pharmacists experienced in this field (GRIT)²

'It's not about what you think is needed'

'It may be good to dig a well, but are you any good at digging a well?'

Beyond 'voluntourism'
Experiences from the field: eight tips for those in pharmacy seeking to help those most in need

The Scale of the Problem
According to the World Bank, 2.2% of the world's population were living in extreme poverty in 2017. This is defined as living on less than US\$1.90 per day (also known as the International Poverty Line).¹ Over 1 billion people have risen out of extreme poverty since 1990, the COVID-19 pandemic pressures to reverse most of this progress, with an estimated 67 million people being pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020, which was predicted to rise to a total of 100 million by the end of 2021.² In a press release on the 7th October 2020, the World Bank credited extreme poverty to rise for the first time in over 20 years as forces of the pandemic, conflict and climate change compounded each other, pushing future generations in jeopardy.³ Increasingly, updated data predicts a reduction in global poverty by 21 million people occurring between 2020 and 2021.⁴ However, even this predicted reduction is not enough to abolish the gap caused by the initial fallout, leaving millions of more people below the poverty line.

Furthermore, the world has been deemed 'off track' in achieving many targets from the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁵ Of particular concern is the shortfall of SDG 1 'No Poverty' and SDG 3 'Good Health and Well-being'. Due to the symbiotic relationship of poverty and ill-health, an increase in access to quality health care is crucial to both SDGs. The World Health Organization has predicted that in order to achieve universal health care by 2030, an extra 18 million health workers are needed in low and lower-middle income countries.⁶ According to the Global Health Observatory, over 8% of WHO Member States had less than the minimums per 10,000 population as of 2020.⁷ Pharmacists are integral to the healthcare team and contribute important skills, not only in ensuring evidence-based medicine, but also through managing stock procurement and co-ordinating supplies, developing guidelines and policies, as well as advising on medication safety. Further, these skills are performed while demonstrating the key attributes of the 14th-century Pharmacist described in the 1007 WHO report on the role of a pharmacist.⁸ These key skills and attributes have proved invaluable in various settings across the globe as many pharmacists have responded to this call to help improve healthcare for those living in poverty.

'Get involved with those in your local postcode'

'Don't expect to see an industrial revolution overnight'

'Learn from others before you go, rather than when you return'

Discussion

Aid and volunteering have the potential to create lasting change when done well with careful consideration. It is imperative to learn from others, leaning on their knowledge and experience to maximise the impact on global poverty.

Whether you're an old hand at aid and volunteering or a new enthusiast, we want to hear from you! Lets learn from each other and create a community of practice - GET INVOLVED, SCAN QR CODE!

Interested in Joining?



SCAN ME

¹Hasell J, Roser M, Ortiz-Ospina E, Arriagada P. Poverty. Our World in Data 2022. Available from <<https://ourworldindata.org/poverty>>

²van der Vliet T, Coombes J, Lloyd J, Winckel K. Beyond 'Voluntourism'. Pharmacy GRIT 2022; 5(4): 170-177. doi: 10.24080/grit.1345