

## Hoping to Help: The Promises and Pitfalls of Global Health Volunteering (The Culture and Politics of Health Care Work)

By Judith N. Lasker

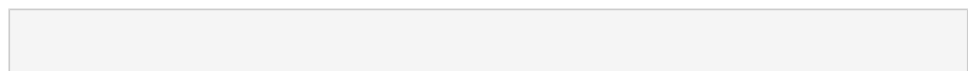
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### **Hoping to Help: The Promises and Pitfalls of Global Health Volunteering (The Culture and Politics of Health Care Work)** By Judith N. Lasker

Overseas volunteering has exploded in numbers and interest in the last couple of decades. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people travel from wealthier to poorer countries to participate in short-term volunteer programs focused on health services. Churches, universities, nonprofit service organizations, profit-making "voluntourism" companies, hospitals, and large corporations all sponsor brief missions. *Hoping to Help* is the first book to offer a comprehensive assessment of global health volunteering, based on research into how it currently operates, its benefits and drawbacks, and how it might be organized to contribute most effectively. Given the enormous human and economic investment in these activities, it is essential to know more about them and to understand the advantages and disadvantages for host communities.

Most people assume that poor communities benefit from the goodwill and skills of the volunteers. Volunteer trips are widely advertised as a means to "give back" and "make a difference." In contrast, some claim that health volunteering is a new form of colonialism, designed to benefit the volunteers more than the host communities. Others focus on unethical practices and potential harm to the presumed "beneficiaries." Judith N. Lasker evaluates these opposing positions and relies on extensive research—interviews with host country staff members, sponsor organization leaders, and volunteers, a national survey of sponsors, and participant observation—to identify best and worst practices. She adds to the debate a focus on the benefits to the sponsoring organizations, benefits that can contribute to practices that are inconsistent with what host country staff identify as most likely to be useful for them and even with what may enhance the experience for volunteers. *Hoping to Help* illuminates the activities and goals of sponsoring organizations and compares dominant practices to the preferences of host country staff and to nine principles for most effective volunteer trips.



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**Editorial Review**

Review

"Many scholars have discussed the theory behind global aid and the various perils in its execution. Dr. Lasker, a professor at Lehigh University, delivers instead a straightforward, data-driven review of a small health-related fraction of the enterprise, aiming to answer a few basic questions: 'Do volunteers help or hurt?' she asks. 'In what ways?'

It turns out these questions cannot be answered, at least not very precisely. Still, anyone contemplating a volunteer stint is likely to be interested in Dr. Lasker's results, which amount to a sort of de facto best-practices manual."?Abigail Zuger, M.D., *The New York Times* (April 25, 2016)

"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. . . . The publication is a triumph of social analysis and commentary, which rigorously appraises and summarises the existing body of evidence on the topic. . . . 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, *British Dental Journal* (August 12, 2016)

"The space where international health volunteering and good intentions collide can get very messy. *Hoping to Help* cleans up the mess. This book should be required reading for anyone interested in volunteering abroad in any capacity, health service or otherwise."?Brandon Blache-Cohen, Executive Director, Amizade Global Service-Learning

"*Hoping to Help* makes a clear and new contribution. The issues Judith N. Lasker examines are increasingly pressing for universities across the United States, as the trend toward internationalization is accompanied by unexpected perverse incentives and adverse impacts such as those Lasker raises. This high-quality book will appeal beyond the global health community to study abroad, service learning, and civic engagement programs, as well as church organizations and civic groups."?Eric Hartman, Kansas State University

"*Hoping to Help* has many important implications for potential international volunteers as well as universities, nongovernmental organizations, and religious organizations in particular."?Benjamin Lough, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

"*Hoping to Help* is an important read for anyone interested in global health or participating in a global health experience. Judith N. Lasker does an excellent job of framing the issues tied to global volunteering into a larger historical context that adds a deeper understanding as to how we have evolved to the situation we have today. She looks at the issue from many stakeholder perspectives, including, most important, that of the host community." Tricia Todd, MPH, University of Minnesota

#### About the Author

Judith N. Lasker is N.E.H. Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Lehigh University. She is coauthor of *When Pregnancy Fails*, *In Search of Parenthood*, and *Equal Time, Equal Value*.

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