



## Guidelines for Predental Students Providing Patient Care

- Harm done to the patient. Everyone's goal is to always help those in need; the first step in that direction must be to avoid causing harm. As a predental student, it may be difficult to know what might cause harm so you must carefully avoid situations where there is any possibility that you might injure or cause other harm to someone.
- Physical harm to yourself. Engaging in the practice of dentistry without sufficient training and protection can result in direct harm to you, as well as to the patient. Further, sponsoring organizations may not have in place plans to assist you if you contract an illness or are injured.
- Legal issues with local authorities. Even if a local dentist is supervising your interactions with patients or says that it is acceptable for you to perform a procedure, violation of local laws may

**Predental students considering participating in an international dental service experience should review the following:**

- The primary purpose of a predental student clinical experience is observation, not hands-on treatment. You are there to learn, not to treat.
- It is appropriate for predental students to provide preventive oral health education and to support the health care team by assisting in the provision of dental treatment after receiving adequate instruction. However, predental students should never engage in any activity that is considered the practice of dentistry including, but not limited to: diagnosing diseases, administering anesthesia, performing extractions or other surgical procedures, restoring teeth, placing sealants, performing prophylaxis, and making impressions.
- There will always be disparities in what individual predental students are prepared to do. Some predental students will be better prepared to take on more advanced patient care (from previous EMT training, for example) than others. Therefore, just because one of your peers has been able to successfully perform a particular task does not mean that you are also ready to undertake it as well. Be aware of your limitations and do not try to exceed them.
- Always keep the welfare of the patient foremost in your mind, not the perceived opportunity for proving yourself to an admissions committee. Ask yourself how you would feel if you were in the place of a patient and a person with no significant healthcare education was about to perform a procedure on you. If this thought makes you feel uncomfortable, it is probably not an appropriate task for you to be doing.
- Predental students should also be aware that it is not necessary to travel abroad to serve those in need. There are many opportunities to help the disadvantaged and other underserved groups in the U.S. There are likely many worthwhile volunteer opportunities in your community, with many more around the country. Dental schools may be more impressed with what you can do to help close to home rather than while abroad.

Adapted with permission from policies developed at Hendrix College, Conway, Arkansas by Mark Sutherland, Ph.D., Professor of Biology

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