

Working with Integrity during the Global Health Residency

March 2020

Introduction

The 6-month Global Health Residency (GHR) completes the training in Global Health and Tropical Medicine (GH&TM). Partnerships with international organisations as well as local hospitals have been established to provide residents with the unique opportunity to develop and consolidate essential skills required to work in an international setting, at the crossroads of clinical medicine and public health. At the same time, partnering hospitals benefit: residents GH&TM are often motivated doctors with a distinct skillset and hard workers!

Building on the experience of over 40 years, the current GH&TM training programme has evolved into a modern curriculum, based on the 7 CANMEDs competencies. The Dutch Doctor GH&TM (AIGT) is able to provide ethically sound, evidence-based and cost-effective preventative and curative care for populations in low-resource settings.

The OIGT recognises that work abroad comes with specific challenges. The notion that the Global North should commit itself selflessly to the Global South has been long and rightfully so discredited – and the GHR is the perfect example of this. The new vision instead centres around mutual knowledge and capacity building.

This document is written for the resident GHTM. It highlights some of the ethical issues that can arise during the GHR and describes the mechanisms to address these. The guideline outlines various types of behaviour that the OIGT finds questionable and goes on to explain what type of interventions the resident can take when confronted with inappropriate behaviour.

Scope and Rationale

Ethical conduct covers a large and complex domain and is linked to personal values and principles. We come from culturally diverse backgrounds and everyone has their own unique reference point – thus differences in values are respected throughout the training programme. However, personal ethics can become a problem when they have negative impacts on others; whether this be the OIGT, the partnering organisations and hospitals, your colleagues or patients.

It is important to recognize that irresponsible behaviour can have a widespread impact:

- **Safety and security of yourself/staff/patients/team:** breaking the law (e.g. theft, assault, engaging in prostitution) can result in a jail sentence and jeopardizes the safety of others.
- **Team spirit and cohesion:** excluding others, bullying, unprofessional social media comments, gossiping etc. can have devastating effects on the team spirit and consequent quality of work delivered.

- **Continuity and quality of the GHR:** before embarking on this residency, you should recognise that you are indirectly representing the training institute and the profession of GH&TM at large – your behaviour can influence how these are perceived. As an ambassador, it is therefore important to think carefully about the possible consequences of your actions or inactions since this may affect your own residency, but also those of future residents. For the hospital, this may have serious consequences as well – in case of serious misconduct for example, you may be asked to leave the hospital which in turn creates gaps in staffing.
- **Image and perception of the doctor GH&TM:** if we are not treating our patients and staff with respect this will have implications for how we are perceived and will ultimately jeopardize our work.

The OIGT Code of Conduct

The *OIGT Code of Conduct* combines elements of the *NVTG Code of Conduct*

(<https://www.nvtg.org/wat-we-doen/gedragscode-isg>)

and the *MSF Code of Conduct* and has been adapted to suit our particular setting.

It is important for you to familiarise yourself with this document, which can be found in Appendix A. The code should form the foundation of the values and ethical standards you operate with throughout your GHR. A number of the leading principles are detailed in the following sections.

What does the OIGT expect from its residents?

In a nutshell, you are expected to:

- Demonstrate respect, cultural awareness and sensitivity towards patients, colleagues and the local population.
- Safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of patients, colleagues and the local population.

Questionable conduct

There are three types of questionable conduct:

1. **Conduct that is punishable by law**

The OIGT recognises that residents are deployed to different countries with different customs and work ethics and where different (labour) laws are applicable. You should respect and adhere to these laws. Familiarising yourself with the local legal frameworks is crucial.

2. **Conduct that is ethically questionable or morally reprehensible**

Examples of this include:

- Abuse of power / exploitation
- Use of alcohol, drugs or other substances
- Misuse of property / information
- Theft / Fraud / Bribery
- Discrimination, intimidation, psychological or physical abuse
- Inappropriate relationships, such as those with sex workers or minors

3. **Poor performance**

Issues with poor performance are normally resolved in day-to-day discussions and/or during evaluations with the local supervisor. If necessary – and as outlined in the different Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) – the International Liaison Officer will be informed of professional incompetence. Extra support or training may be necessary.

Donations

A subject which deserves special attention is that of donations. If you are considering donating something, reflect on your own motives for doing so first. Think about the possible consequences of your donation and the sustainability. Try to find out what is needed. Be discreet. And **always** consult your local supervisor **and** the International Liaison Officer before making a donation.

Action

Perpetrator of inappropriate behaviour

The OIGT does not under any circumstances accept conduct that is punishable by law or conduct that is morally reprehensible from its residents. If you receive a formal complaint you are obliged to inform the International Liaison Officer of the OIGT of this.

Victim of inappropriate behaviour

If you have been the victim of intimidating behaviour and addressing the issue with the person involved or disclosing it to your local supervisor is not an option for you or has not resolved the issue, you can get in touch with the International Liaison Officer of the OIGT. Alternatively, there is always the option to discuss matters with (one of) the two independent confidential counsellors of the OIGT, one male, one female. Their names and phone numbers may be found on the screened part of the website of TROIE.

Addressing third party inappropriate behaviour

When confronted with inappropriate behaviour, either directly experienced or witnessed, residents are encouraged to first – if possible – address it themselves with the person concerned. If this is not possible, or does not lead to the desired result, you are encouraged to speak to your local supervisor about the issue at hand. Of course, throughout this course of action, the International Liaison Officer remains available for consultation.

If you notice substantial wrongdoings in the organisation or hospital you are working for, such as large-scale abuse or fraud which exceed or involve local management, you are encouraged to express your concerns to the OIGT.

Cultural Awareness

Demonstrating respect, cultural awareness and sensitivity towards patients, colleagues and the local population may sound like a logical and straightforward principle, but in practice it is not always as easily said as done! A great deal of critical self-reflection on one's role as a resident in general and Westerner in particular is necessary before one can really act with tact, diplomacy and respect during the GHR.

Below are a number of practical pieces of advice to aid you in cultivating cultural awareness. Some of these tips have been taken from Judith van de Kamp's book *De Derde Wereld op je CV* (2019):

- Immerse yourself in the history, culture, economy, politics of the country.
- Settling into a new country takes time, grant yourself this.
- Recognise that what you perceive about others says a lot about you: your assumptions, your expectations. Try exercising self-reflection in this aspect.
- Be aware of the dangers of blogging: beware of stereotyping and incorrect explanations for local situations. We often tend to write/report about peaks and lows without highlighting the average – and in doing so, we contribute to pervasive persistent prejudices.
- Take the time to *really* get to know your colleagues.
- Show respect for superiors (and when in doubt, mimic how others do so).
- Actively ask if there are any rules you should abide by.
- Ask your local colleagues openly what they do and why. This will not only cultivate respect, but can also help you to understand internal processes.
- Be modest, you are here to learn.
- Dress appropriately, both during and outside working hours.
- Be cautious when taking pictures. Reflect on how appropriate the picture is and always ask permission.

Appendix A: OIGT Code of Conduct

Introduction

This Code of Conduct aims to offer a regulatory framework for all residents Global Health and Tropical Medicine, in particular during their Global Health Residency in countries that are typically characterized by a scarcity of resources and manpower. It offers residents principles and guidelines to act responsibly and ethically.

It is the opinion of the OIGT that it is primarily the responsibility of the host countries to stipulate the laws and regulations attaining to (para)medical actions, health interventions or research. Having said this, gaps in legislation, regulation or enforcement of these laws may exist in some countries. Thus, it often comes down to the individual responsibility of the resident active in the field of global health to make sound judgments.

Aims

The OIGT Code of Conduct aims to:

- Promote integrity, responsibility and professional conduct;
- Promote the highest possible standard of practice; and
- Encourage a culture of self-evaluation.

Principles

RESPECT

The resident commits to:

- Look primarily at the interests of the local partners and local population.
- Carry out activities with the consent of the authorized local (medical) authority.
- See local health professionals as equals.
- Acknowledge and respect local laws and regulations, unless these are specifically in conflict with internationally acknowledged human rights or the Dutch medical oath.
- Behave respectfully and not discriminate against patients, colleagues or members of the local population on the basis of their race, opinions, lifestyle, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, origin, religion or beliefs and other markers of identity.

INTEGRITY

The resident commits to:

- Being honest and open in his/her practices.
- Avoiding conflict of interests.
- Handling confidential and sensitive information as such.
- Not abusing anyone physically (i.e. physical violence, sexual aggression or other forms of physical abuse) or psychologically (e.g. bullying, abuse of power, harassment, discrimination or favouritism).
- Not engaging in fraud or theft.

COOPERATION

The resident commits to:

- Acting as an ambassador of the OIGT.
- Ensuring that all interventions and projects implemented are in line with local health needs and explicitly requested or approved of by local senior management.
- Going to great lengths to create conditions to ensure sustainability of projects.

PROFESSIONALISM

The resident commits to:

- Performing medical procedures according to Dutch best-standard practices, taking into account the local possibilities and one's own limitations.