



Health Volunteers Overseas
Transforming Lives Through Education

Physical Therapy Bhutan

Project Description

GOALS:

1. To facilitate the teaching and training of physical therapy technician students to be competent as independent clinicians working in district hospitals.
2. To provide continuing education and consultant services to the Bhutanese physical therapy technicians at the National Referral Hospital.
3. To strengthen existing PT services and help promote rehabilitation as part of the existing Primary Health Care system.
4. To provide teacher mentoring and training so that the local staff will assume more of the teaching duties.

LENGTH OF ASSIGNMENT: Volunteers are needed for a length of four months.

VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS: The most important qualifications are flexibility, patience, diplomacy, and enthusiasm. Being adventurous is a big plus as well! Potential volunteers must be licensed to practice physical therapy and have at least five years of work experience. Previous work in a rural setting or experience working in a developing country is helpful. Volunteers may be in active practice or retired. Volunteers must have teaching/training experience, and a strong desire to teach. Preference will be given to volunteers in academia or with significant teaching backgrounds. Experience in rehabilitation, pediatrics, acute care, and use of adaptive equipment such as thermoplastic splints and special seating are desirable.

Occupational therapists who specialize in hand therapy/rehab or pediatrics and have teaching experience may be considered for shorter term assignments. The OT volunteer would assist the regularly scheduled PT volunteer.

Proficiency in the English language is required. Volunteers should be in good physical condition, as a considerable amount of walking at high altitudes is required.

Volunteers are required to submit copies of their professional licenses and certifications to HVO prior to their volunteer assignment - which will be forwarded to the appropriate contacts in Bhutan.

PROJECT: This project focuses on teaching and training of physical therapy technician (PTT) students at the National Referral Hospital in the capital city of Thimphu. The students are enrolled in a two-year physical therapy program, the first three months of which are conducted at the Royal Institute of Health Sciences (RIHS). Classes are given in anatomy/physiology, hygiene, first aid, and nutrition. These subjects are taught by qualified nurses, health assistants and health workers. The remainder of the training is done at the Physiotherapy Unit at the National Referral Hospital where most of the learning is hands-on, with one to two hour lectures per day.

After students complete the two year program, HVO volunteers will help prepare PT graduates in advanced evaluation and treatment techniques before they go to district hospitals where they will

need to know how to evaluate, treat, and/or give advice about all types of disabilities. As there are only a handful of physiotherapists in Bhutan, all in Thimphu at present, the technicians in the districts work independently, and truly function as therapists. Additionally, as there are no occupational or speech therapists, their job is multi-faceted and they do as much as they can with limited resources. Volunteers provide both clinical training and classroom teaching, always with an emphasis on the 'hands-on' approach. Yearly (usually in the Spring), a "refresher course" for all PTTs is conducted - sometimes this is a workshop or training of something completely new.

Volunteers will see patients at the hospital, but always in the context of training the students and staff. Orthopedic rounds are Tuesday and Friday mornings in the ortho ward and provide excellent learning, and teaching opportunities.

Volunteers will be given a teaching curriculum with objectives, and teaching material is available on HVO *KnowNET*. Volunteers can create their own lectures and teaching material but, for consistency, need to teach to the objectives listed. There are old exams available as well. It is helpful if volunteers provide HVO with any newly created helpful teaching material which can then be posted on the *KnowNET* for future volunteers to use. It is best to contact the current volunteer (a few months before your assignment) to get a more accurate idea of what you will be teaching. We try to let the volunteers teach in their areas of expertise as much as this is possible. All types of patients are seen at the hospital including orthopaedic, neurologic (growing numbers of spinal cord and stroke), burns, pediatric, and medical. In-patients are seen on the wards (and sometimes brought to the therapy department) and outpatients are seen (without appointments) in the therapy department.

Working hours at the hospital are 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM Monday through Friday and 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM on Saturday. Saturdays are NOT mandatory for volunteers. Volunteers should plan sightseeing trips lasting more than a day or two for the end of their assignment. It is important that volunteers work daily just as the regular hospital staff does, (with the exception of Saturday). There are frequent government holidays in Bhutan, some lasting up to 3 days.

The students have a break from school around Christmas and return in early to mid January. Volunteers should know that during this time period many of the Bhutanese and expatriates also leave on vacation. Volunteers ending their assignment in December should consider staying in Thimphu a couple extra weeks in January to allow for sufficient orientation time with the next volunteer after the students have returned to class.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: See "Bhutan General Information" document.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES: A photocopier is available. The RIHS has a skeleton, some anatomical models, overhead projectors and some computers. Handouts are the main teaching tool. The PT department has a large selection of books to reference and photocopy from, if desired (there is a list of these books available on the *KnowNET*). Students are not given textbooks to keep. There is a recently enlarged library at the hospital with a good selection of anatomy and medical texts journals. The current physio dept (what will be the outpatient dept) has an old computer and printer, but no internet connection. The new hospital (which will be the inpatient dept) should have a new computer linked to the hospital and with internet access. The hospital has very recently started telemedicine. Doctors and healthcare workers from rural areas e-mail questions and pictures of patients to doctors and health staff in Thimphu for advice. This is an extremely valuable addition; it saves lives by providing immediate advice by experts, and also helps advise whether or

not it is necessary for a patient to make the long journey to Thimphu.

There was a newly constructed 4 story hospital building in 2012 which houses the in-patient PT department (IPD) in this main hospital building. The outpatient physiotherapy department (OPD) is across the street which means a longer walk between the two sections of PT. Currently the staff rotates between the wards and the outpatient unit every 2 months.

The **Physical Therapy Unit** now consists of a number of different locations:

- OPD (outpatient physiotherapy department) located on the left side of the road going to the hospital
- Hand therapy and splinting is next to OPD
- IPD (in-patient department) – on the third floor of the main hospital
- The classroom and the computer room for student use are both in IPD
- Pediatrics is on the ground floor of the old administrative building

HOUSING: Housing is provided for volunteers. See "Bhutan General Information" document for further details.

ATTENTION: In many cases, an accompanying spouse, companion or family member (age 18 and older) is interested in participating in a volunteer capacity. In general, HVO is able to facilitate such assignments, especially for those with health care training. However, it would be up to the individual to be pro-active in developing a volunteer assignment. Many times, a role for these volunteers is not defined until after arrival at the site.

In order for an assignment to be under the auspices of HVO, a spouse, companion or family member will be required to become a member of HVO and sign a release form prior to their assignment.

Site Suitable for Spouse?

YES NO

Site Suitable for Children?

YES NO

LANGUAGE: The official language of Bhutan, *Dzongkha*, is related to classical Tibetan and is written partly in the classical Tibetan script, *Choekay*. Nepali predominates in southern Bhutan. As many as 11 other vernacular languages are spoken. English, the official working language and medium of instruction in schools and college, is widely used.

PASSPORT & VISAS: A passport and visa are required. Passports must be valid for 6 months **after the end of the volunteer assignment**. See "Bhutan General Information" for further details.

REGISTRATION WITH US EMBASSY: All US volunteers are encouraged to register with the local US Embassy. See "Bhutan General Information" document for further details. Another option is to enroll in the Dept of State Smart Traveler Enrollment Program before you depart – see "Practical Information for Your Trip".

CLOTHING/CLIMATE: During the winter, long johns are recommended and frequently are lifesavers when you are in the operating room or other areas of the hospital. Due to the altitude,

temperatures cool off in the evening, and even in May you may need a jacket or sweater in the evening. During mid-day it warms up; however, in the afternoon the wind picks up and cools things off quickly. In winter it is cold, particularly indoors where you expect it to be warmer. When working in the hospital or clinic, a white coat (brought by the volunteer) over a shirt is reasonable attire. Male volunteers are requested to bring one jacket with slacks and a tie which are mandatory in formal situation. Female attire for working is below-the-knee skirts or slacks (no blue jeans). Many female volunteers choose to wear the Bhutanese half-kira which is a long wrap around skirt (now made by local tailors with velcro and snaps for foreigners!)- these are very easy to wear, comfortable, and the Bhutanese appreciate the gesture. Please note that local customs require that females wear long skirts while visiting monasteries and in formal situations.

Volunteers are expected to dress in a professional manner while fulfilling their assignment duties at the project site. Professional attire does not include shorts, short skirts, sleeveless tops, flip flops or other casual attire not appropriate in a professional setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Volunteers accepted for this project will be provided with additional information regarding housing, visas, travel, and other topics.

ORIENTATION MATERIALS: All volunteers have access to the *HVO KnowNET*, where the majority of the essential orientation materials are stored. The *HVO KnowNET* - linked at the top of the [HVO website](#) - contains a variety of useful background materials including: how to obtain a visa; hints and suggestions from previous volunteers to a site; copies of volunteer talks/ lectures; curriculum information; trip reports from previous volunteers, etc. To receive access to the *HVO KnowNET*, contact HVO Member Services at membership@hvousa.org.

HVO MEMBERSHIP: All volunteers with confirmed assignments must be members of HVO. The costs associated with developing a meaningful volunteer opportunity, as well as recruiting, briefing and placing a volunteer exceed \$900. Dues help defray these costs and provide essential funding for HVO ensuring that we will be able to continue placing volunteers – today, tomorrow and next year. Dues are \$150 for physicians and dentists; \$70 for nurses and allied health professionals; and \$40 for those in training. To join, visit our secure web site (<http://www.hvousa.org/waystogive.shtml>) or call the HVO office.

For more information about HVO programs, please visit our web site at www.hvousa.org

9/14