

Volunteerism in Dermatology

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Summary

Volunteerism in America dates back to the early settlers. Physicians participate in volunteer activities in high numbers and on many levels. This article provides an overview of the many ways that dermatologists give back to the specialty of dermatology, medicine as a whole, and their community. Strategies and opportunities for leadership in organized medicine are reviewed. From private practice to academic medicine and from the local level to the national level, various options for leadership through volunteerism are described and explored. For those interested in promoting the common good, this article may provide a starting point or be used as a reference while working to achieve their volunteerism and leadership goals.

History of Volunteerism

Volunteerism has a long and interesting history in the United States. American colonists volunteered their time by forming support systems to help each other as they struggled to survive relocation. Benjamin Franklin founded the first firehouse in 1736, a tradition that continues today in many small towns and cities that maintain a volunteer fire department. During the Revolutionary War, leaders volunteered their time to raise money for war efforts and showed their solidarity by organizing boycotts of an array of products originating in Great Britain. In the 1800s, the strengthening of religious groups inspired legions of young people to become involved in helping others through relief programs, outreach to the homeless and help to those victimized by uncontrollable circumstances. Groups well known now such as the YMCA (mid 1800s), the Red Cross (1881) and the United Way were formed during the 19th century as well. Mainstream volunteerism began in the 20th century with the advent of public groups such as the Rotary Club (1910), the Lions Club and the Kiwanis Club (by 1920). The concept of organized volunteerism continued with other organizations and Americans were very involved. During the Great Depression, when the unmet need was primarily food and shelter, soup kitchens had their start. Untold numbers of Americans were aided by the bread lines of the time. Through the remainder of the 20th century and up to today, volunteer opportunities exploded. Organizations such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Habitat for Humanity and Montessori were formed on the basis of volunteerism to achieve their respective missions. Pro bono, Latin for being involved in or doing professional work (often legal), is a household term. President Obama has made volunteerism a priority with a program called Volunteer for Organizing for America (1), a campaign to match volunteers with community needs. In a time of economic uncertainty, volunteerism affords people the opportunity to devote time and energy to improving the welfare of those around them. The benefits to those helped and to those volunteering often cannot be measured objectively, but are fundamental to life as we know it.

Introduction

Dermatologists as a group have set a high standard for volunteerism by participating in large numbers in a multitude of activities. Organized dermatology is very supportive of the concept of volunteerism within its ranks. Many academic centers pride themselves on and require their members to participate in community or program-based service opportunities. Community-based dermatology practices commit themselves to a lifetime of helping others. National and international programs link physicians and staff with those in need.

Leadership, or the act of guiding others toward the accomplishment of a common goal, goes hand in hand with volunteerism. Leaders share certain characteristics such as having vision and persistence as well as being innovative and proactive. Leadership requires experience and volunteerism is an excellent opportunity to gain it. By providing valuable career and life experiences, volunteerism stands strong as a fundamental part of the pursuit of happiness.

This article will provide a review of the various ways that dermatologists volunteer and offer insights and tips for the dermatologist interested in giving back. Featured opportunities will be presented, but a comprehensive listing is beyond the scope of this article.

Content

Volunteerism in Organized Medicine

Most dermatologists are members of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) (2). The AAD, recognizing the need for recognition of valuable community service, established the Leadership Circle of Volunteerism. The program is based on reporting of hours spent participating in good-faith activities. Both the number of hours accumulated each year and the total number of hours are recognized. Gold level volunteers participated in 1,000+ hours of service in a given year, silver level volunteers spent 500-999 hours and bronze level volunteers invested 100-499 hours. Recognition is provided via a lapel pin and ribbon, publication in the Academy's trade journal *Dermatology World*, their website and an official directory of volunteers. Recognizing cumulative volunteer service is done through the Members Making a Difference program that chooses a winner each month based on the significance of the nominee's work. Nominations may be made by the individual volunteer, a colleague, employee or friend.

The AAD offers opportunities to participate in many other programs. Camp Discovery, formed in 1993, is a summer camp offering children with skin diseases an opportunity to interact with other children who may also have skin disease. Cared for by dermatologists and nurses, this week-long program is aimed to increase confidence and independence in a fun and safe environment. Often, counselors have skin diseases allowing children to relate to a mentor who understands their condition. There is no fee for the camp, as it is supported through donations. For dermatologists wishing to stay closer to home, the AAD Skin Cancer Screening Program can be conducted any time by requesting and utilizing standard triplicate forms that allow for the efficient screening of a large or small group of participants. The patient, screener and AAD each retain a copy of the form for future follow-up on any suspicious lesions found.

One of the most interesting programs offered through the AAD is the Leadership Forum. Primarily aimed at young dermatologists, this weekend program provides leadership skills through interaction, leading speakers and a personality evaluation using the Myers-Briggs assessment. Goals of the program include increasing communication skills and self-awareness as well as learning how to define vision and strategy. Eligible participants have expenses paid by the Academy for travel, accommodations and meals.

The American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ASDS) (3) encourages volunteerism through its mentoring program. Called the Preceptorship Program, eligible participants spend a week with one of a network of senior members practicing within an area of interest to the participant. The program is designed to introduce participants to the variety of dermatological surgery disciplines, allowing a more informed choice to be made about which to pursue. The ASDS bills its program as a way to learn skills in areas where innovation has outpaced traditional learning programs. Applications are accepted on the basis of merit and may be accepted from all board-certified or board-eligible ASDS Fellows and third year residents. Funding is supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Allergan, Inc. Preceptors volunteer their time and are required to be at least 5 years out of training and have teaching as well as leadership experience. In 2011, the ASDS will roll out its newly minted International Preceptorship Program, the goal of which is to enhance information exchange among dermatological surgeons in the U.S. and abroad.

The Women's Dermatological Society provides a number of community outreach services. In addition to raising funds for dermatology research, the society focuses heavily on sun safety and prevention of skin cancer through a comprehensive education program. For example, they work with the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to promote the Friday before Memorial Day as "Don't Fry Day".

Aside from national programs, dermatologists have the opportunity to combine leadership with volunteerism at the state and local level. State medical societies or associations often are structured to mirror the general governance of the American Medical Association (AMA). Learning the structure of the organization can help one understand how it functions and help to form a better idea of how organized medicine works. Depending on the state, there may not be very many dermatologists who are active at the state level. State medical groups are a great way for the young dermatologist to begin his or her leadership path while being productive close to home. For example, in South Carolina, the state medical association has a board of trustees that is composed of members elected by the county medical societies

in the districts they represent. There is an executive committee made up of a subset of board members. There is a position for a young physician, a resident and a medical student trustee. With hard work, attention and desire, one can move up the ranks and progress to the national level by becoming involved with the AMA. There are committees for every function. Most state medical groups hold at least one educational meeting each year and they are often in dire need of dermatology educators for their mostly nondermatologist members. Many physicians outside dermatology have not received much education in the specialty during their training and usually find the lectures on topics such as medical dermatology, dermatological surgery or cosmetic dermatology or activities quite interesting. Legislative activity is a large part of the function of a state medical group. Often the watchdog for physicians in the state, state medical groups provide an essential function by providing unified lobbying and legislative interaction on behalf of member physicians. For someone with political ambition or who is concerned about the direction of medicine, this is the ideal way to be a volunteer and a leader. Calling, emailing and visiting state congress lets legislators know where you stand. Many state groups organize "Doctor of the Day" functions during which physicians provide on-site medical services to legislators. Time for interaction with lawmakers is provided. These activities go a long way on behalf of physicians and help to educate state congress members on issues important to patients and physicians alike.

Also at the state level is the state dermatology association or society. Primarily educational, state dermatology groups allow dermatologists around the state to get to know each other. This is invaluable because there are many common goals. Aside from running an annual educational event, many have other educational events, meetings and dinners for their members. For someone interested in leadership, the state dermatology group is another great way to get started. Usually, there is governance made up of an executive committee and board members representing different areas of the state. State dermatology groups are involved in volunteerism. Advocating for patient safety and welfare, promoting goals of the common good and leadership development are just examples of how these groups benefit their states. Many are also involved in legislative activities on behalf of their members. In addition to providing lobbying services, state dermatology groups help their members get to know their legislative representatives. Statehouse skin cancer screenings have become a popular way to band dermatologists together in volunteerism and advocacy. The AAD has a State Society Development Task Force that is charged with the duty aid state societies to advance. The AAD Model State Society Award recognizes state dermatological societies that meet certain criteria for governance, advocacy, education and communication.

State medical boards are another way dermatologists give back. By serving on a state medical board, dermatologists work on behalf of patients, ensuring that their state's physicians are practicing in accordance with state law and in a safe and competent manner. Scope of practice issues are commonly dealt with at the state medical board level and are of importance to dermatologists and other specialties alike. Every state board has a different way of selecting its members, but many are made up of a mixture of physicians, nonphysicians and laypersons in an effort to ensure impartiality.

Locally, county medical societies serve an important purpose as liaison to the state medical association. Governed in much the same way as state associations, physicians from various specialties unify to benefit the citizens of the county as well as its physicians. Many provide important advocacy functions to their counties and keep physicians abreast of local health concerns. Some cities have local dermatology groups that get together to further educational and advocacy goals. Some locales run free clinics. An example of a particularly well-established free clinic is the Volunteers in Medicine (VIM) (4) in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Formed in 1992, when one in three residents of the island had no access to medical care, it now conducts more than 31,000 patient visits a year. Seven hundred volunteers are involved with the clinic. Many patients, who could not afford to help in other ways, donate their time back to the clinic, providing essential services that allow the clinic to save money for patient care. With an organized fundraising campaign, the clinic is on sure footing. Dermatologists along with a myriad of other specialists volunteer their time to support the health of their communities.

Volunteerism in Academic Medicine

Those that are involved in academic medicine know that volunteerism, leadership and mentoring opportunities abound. One of the most common ways that community dermatologists volunteer is to serve as a volunteer faculty member at their local university-based residency program. Each program has its own expectations. Generally, volunteer faculty are expected to attend department conferences such as grand rounds, supervise residents in clinics a minimum number of times annually and have residents

attend clinic in their private offices. In other programs, volunteer faculty participate in departmental academic activities such as research, publication, grant procurement and teaching. The benefits to serving as volunteer faculty are many. First and foremost is the opportunity to enhance the learning of residents by sharing your clinical and other experience. Staying on the forefront of new technology is another. Teaching helps one keep his or her skills sharp, even in areas where practice routine has resulted in less ongoing exposure to a particular aspect of the field. There has been some controversy as to the manner in which academic titles are awarded to volunteer faculty (5). Many dermatology departments have guidelines with respect to how and when a volunteer title can or cannot be used for self-promotion. Besides teaching, some academic dermatology departments offer free or reduced-fee services as part of a community health initiative. One such program exists at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. Here, comprehensive dermatological care is provided at a regional community health center one day a week. The university encourages medical and pharmacy students at all levels to volunteer, especially if they are interested in exploring the field of dermatology.

Volunteerism in Private Practice

Volunteer opportunities are available in great numbers for those physicians in private dermatology, dermatological surgery or cosmetic dermatology practices. There are some that say the highest form of charitable giving is to sustain someone by helping them to find employment or establish themselves in business so as to prevent them from being dependent on others. One of the most common ways private dermatology practices give back is to conduct a mentoring program. There is really no right or wrong way to do this. In the most simple form, mentoring can be accomplished by simply allowing the occasional visitor to spend a half or full day at your office. There are many aspects to a dermatology practice that would be of interest to a young person. Of course, there is the medical side of the practice, seeing patients, making notes, workflow, assistants, nurses, pathology and lab reports and so on. Simple to the provider or staff, these things can be fascinating to someone just learning or interested in the field. Often, without any publicity, friends or family may ask if you might let their son or daughter come and shadow you or your paramedical professional for a few hours. This gives you the opportunity to be a mentor and make a difference in someone's life. You would be surprised and shocked at how appreciative these visitors can be. Just by observing, they are seeing a professional at work, learning what it takes to operate a practice, make a living and how important work ethic is to a successful career. Concepts learned can be applied to many varied professions and vocations. Young people may not know what work ethic is until they see it in action. Dermatology practices are businesses and therefore have other components of a business as well. There are accounting, administrative, coding and reimbursement, marketing, human resources management, real estate, information technology, communications, privacy, regulation, laboratory services and so on. Some visitors may have interests that lie outside of the medical practice itself. For example, you may have a budding high schooler interested in a business career that would be fascinated to see how a small business runs. Spending a few hours with your office manager can introduce him or her to basic accounting, banking, personnel management or advertising principles. As you develop your practice's mentoring program, you may wish to take on more opportunities that may be available in your area. Working with local schools, offering your site as a career exploration option for students, may be very rewarding. Limit the time involved to whatever makes you feel comfortable, as inevitably a visitor may cut into your productivity somewhat. Often, one is surprised at how helpful they can be. If you happen to be more inclined toward formal teaching, a relationship with a local or distant medical assistant or esthetician training program may be desirable. Job experience is highly desirable to students in these fields and many programs encourage volunteering at local practices to be an invaluable opportunity to gain real-world experience. Motivated by the desire to give back, there is also the benefit of free labor. Students usually come ready to work and can provide many services to your practice while learning essential on-the-job skills that will carry them forward in their careers. Of significant advantage, hosting volunteer students is a great way to find capable new employees. After having had the opportunity to have a student for what becomes an extended "working interview", you may be ready to hire them when they finish their program. Since they have already worked in your organization, costly training can be minimized.

Research in private practice is becoming more popular. The conduct of clinical trials has tended toward the expansion beyond academic settings and into the private practice. Integrating research into your clinical practice can be a wonderful way to stay engaged with the changing world of medicine. Allocation of time and resources to research will depend on what you would like to accomplish. While research is often reimbursed by corporate sponsors, such as pharmaceutical companies, clinical research firms or

device manufacturers, it can also be looked at as a way of contributing to the body of medical knowledge. There is sometimes the opportunity to be on the development team for a new drug, product or device. Often, reimbursement does not compensate for time spent, so research can be a labor of love. While incorporating research can be a wonderful and engaging way to practice medicine, it is very important to familiarize yourself with the process. Conducting research raises a host of risk management and ethical considerations not to be glossed over. Potential pitfalls include liability related to patient injury or death, lack of proper informed consent, allegations of privacy loss, Food and Drug Administration oversight and regulatory violations, intellectual property conflicts, improper compensation or accounting and fraud. Human subject protection training is required by most sponsors and it is best to familiarize yourself with the process of working with an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB provides necessary oversight related to the conduct of clinical trials. Most academic institutions have their own IRB, but private practices typically rely on a commercial IRB or one that provides oversight to research sites that do not have their own. For the most part, with large trials in which your office is just one of many clinical research sites, the IRB process will be handled for you and the sponsor will provide all approved materials for your use. If you decide to create your own study, you will have to use a commercial IRB. Disclosure laws, part of the new health care reform bill will require companies to disclose their financial relationships, however small, with physicians. Some firms have already begun disclosure of physician relationships on their corporate websites.

Private practices give in other ways. By tapping into local or national charitable options, a practice can find countless ways to donate time or resources. One need not look far for a chance to help. Examples include clothing or food drives, donations in honor of practice milestones or events, speaking engagements at fundraisers and holiday donations. Some practices follow a common corporate practice of donating a day or part of a day to help out a local charitable organization to further its mission. While this can be useful, some might feel that a financial donation would be more useful or effective than an onslaught of personnel who may not be familiar with the receiving organization's workflow.

Volunteerism on an International Level

While an exhaustive compilation of international volunteer opportunities in dermatology is beyond the scope of this article, dermatologists interested in volunteering their services or time on an international basis can begin with opportunities offered through the AAD. As the largest and most influential organized dermatology group, the AAD has taken the initiative to create a database of its members who are interested in international outreach programs. One such program is the Teledermatology Outreach Project (6). Telemedicine uses modern communications technology to provide medical services at a distance from a major or expert medical center. Video and sound communications (teledermatology) are well suited to dermatology due to the visual nature of the specialty. By connecting remote places to dermatology experts via video link, the exchange of expert medical information can be facilitated. The AAD's African Teledermatology Project connects remote lands such as Uganda, Botswana, Malawi and others with partners in Africa, the United States and Austria. Dermatologists can register online for the program and receive teledermatology consults on an as-needed basis. The AAD hopes to create a platform for research collaboration among partner countries as well as an online archive of unique dermatological conditions. Archiving interesting and rare cases is part of an effort to create an online educational resource for the training of medical specialists in different countries.

In keeping with its commitment to international volunteerism, the AAD has established several other programs such as the Residents International Grant. Through this program, a small number of senior residents will spend a 4-week period with volunteers establishing dermatology support programs and telemedicine services. The AAD also works with Health Volunteers Overseas (HVO) to put together dermatologists with international opportunities. Dermatologists participating in this program spend 4 weeks training local health care providers so they can improve the lives of those in their own communities. For those short on time, the AAD offers the opportunity to travel to Mexico to provide instruction on basic dermatology one day and provide clinic services in a rural area the next. Lastly, the Educator's Grant provides funding for a small number of educators from emerging countries to travel to the USA and attend one of the AAD's two major annual meetings.

Aside from the AAD, there are many international organizations dedicated to providing services to those in need overseas. Some send expatriates on short-term overseas assignments (7), while others recover surplus medical supplies and equipment from hospitals in the United States and make them available to those in need (8). One of the most well-known international organizations of volunteer physicians is

Doctors Without Borders (9). This large and wide spread group also known as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) delivers aid to nearly 60 countries to those severely affected by natural disaster, acts of war, malnutrition, disease or exclusion from local health care. Independent, the group will utilize medical teams to assess a population's need for medical services before beginning programs there. MSF rejects the notion that people living in developing or poor countries deserve low quality or no medical care. Members can often be found speaking out on humanitarian concerns such as governmental oppression and the delivery of medicine to downtrodden nations. Omni Med (10), another international medical care delivery organization, focuses its efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Providing opportunities to engage in short-term medical volunteerism and teaching, Omni Med also aims to establish sustainable collaborative programs to improve medical care for the poor. The U.S. Peace Corps (11), a large and influential government-sponsored volunteer organization, participates in many types of work. Health volunteers provide education, water and sanitation aid. Construction services work with local communities to build health care facilities, schools, markets and conduct other projects to benefit the locale.

The International Society of Dermatology conducts a mentorship program designed to promote the idea of international dermatology mentorships. Taking applications, the organization provides financial support for younger dermatologists and residents as well as placement and support services for dermatologists of all ages. Medical Teams International (12) provides dermatology services among others to residents of El Salvador by sending teams of medical professionals approximately four times a year.

Conclusion

Volunteer opportunities in dermatology are numerous and widespread. For those interested in helping to promote the common good, there seems no end to the ways that support can be given. From organized medicine, private practice and academic centers to lands far away, the chance to make a difference abounds in every direction. This overview was designed as an introduction to volunteerism in dermatology that can serve as a starting point for anyone interested in getting involved. There are many, many people in the world in desperate need of help. Lives are affected on both sides of the equation when people give of themselves to help others while asking for nothing in return.

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