Vietnam Village Trek 2008

Dispensing Medicine in the Pharmacy

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When we first arrived at the first village to begin dispensing medicine I had a hard time getting into the routine of my role as a helper. However, when people started to come into the dispensing room everything fell into place and we automatically had a system going. The different medicines were placed on a table where many of the Global Impact volunteers were stationed. The doctors would hand us the prescriptions so that we would fill them with the correct quantity of medicine and place them in small white envelopes, each envelope with a separate medicine. Before the actual medicine was placed into the envelope we would write in Vietnamese how the people should take the medicine. Since my future career goal is to become a pharmacist, I spent most of the day in both of the villages in the dispensing room. As a result, I was able to use my Vietnamese to help the other Global Impact participants who were unable to read the directions in Vietnamese to transfer them onto the small white envelope. There were so many patients in the clinic receiving medicine that the directions became repetitive and everyone was eventually able to read the basic directions in Vietnamese. In the end, we decided to write down on a piece of paper the common Vietnamese words that other participants would see on prescriptions so that they would have an easier time writing the directions on the small white envelope. Pharmacy was a success because we had many people working collaboratively to make the pharmacy an efficient and stress free environment.
In the pharmacy there were typically four people working at a time. In pairs, one person would write the directions while the other person was filling the prescription. As a result of this collaborative team work we were able to fill two prescriptions at a time. Since there was an overwhelming amount of medicine in the dispensing room we decided to organize the medicine in alphabetical order so that it would be easier for us to find the medicine when we took the prescription from the doctor. In addition, if one of the volunteers got tired of doing their job they would switch jobs so that we would not be doing the same thing. The system of dispensing went so well because we were able to speak to each other to find the most effective way of getting the medicine to the people in a fast and efficient way. Even though some of the medicine’s directions were repetitive we were not expert in writing Vietnamese. As a result, when both groups were done filling the prescriptions the closest person to the doctors would hand the medicine to the doctor and the doctor would not only double check the quantity and medicine within the small white envelope but also the directions that were on the white envelope. If the doctor found any mistake he would ask us to change the medicine. In addition, if he saw any writing mistakes on the white envelopes he would hand it back to us. I found that the doctors were really helpful because they were patient with us while at the same time informing us about the type of medicine that was being handed out.
One of the biggest benefits that I received from this experience was the information about each medicine that was handed out. For example, an antibiotic, amoxicillin, was handed out to people that had an infection; it was handed out typically in quantity of either 15 or 20 pills. Another pill that was handed out from time to time was a Mebendazole tab, a one time pill to get rid of ring worms. There were other medicines that were handed out besides pills; for example, Chloramphenical caps, which were droplets used to treat infections in the eye. Another non-pill medication we dispensed was ORS – Oral Rehydration Salts—used for people who were thought to be dehydrated. Some of these medications I was not familiar with before the Vietnam Village Trek. There were some that I was familiar with, though. For example, the medicine ibuprofen is something I personally take when I get headaches and body aches.

This experience of actually filling the medicine and actually seeing the medicine being directly given to the patient definitely reinforced my career choice of becoming a pharmacist. I want to be the person that they ask questions of about the medicine that they are receiving.
This experience really gave me the idea of how it would be if I was to become a pharmacist in the future. I have volunteered at the Highline Hospital pharmacy and see that both environments of dealing with medicine and doctors are pretty similar. One similarity between the two environments is that pharmacists/doctors in the pharmacy had to revert back to the doctors that were handing out the prescription when some of the medicine that is prescribed was not in stock. As a result, the doctor had to figure out a substitute medicine that was available. I noticed that both of the doctors were collaborating back and forth about the type of medicine and what quantity they should give. Witnessing this conversation between the doctors about solving a medical issue for a patient really helped me understand what to expect and how to deal with issues when I become a pharmacist. Overall, this experience of working in the pharmacy is unforgettable. This trip not only gave me the opportunity learn more about the culture and people of Vietnam but also to learn more about the pharmacy healthcare community that I will soon join. In addition, this trip was even more memorable because of the people with whom I was able to share the experience.