

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING:

### EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE KIA VOLUNTEER

The following Memorandum of Understanding is blunt and to the point. It is not meant to scare potential volunteers off, but by the same token, we don't want anyone to sign up with false assumptions. In the past, we have had some new participants complain that their expectations were not met, or refused to accept responsibilities that are crucial to the smooth and efficient functioning of Kindness in Action.

You are volunteering to participate in a dental mission to a third world country. You are not going on a holiday. Kindness In Action is about helping the less fortunate, as equals, under difficult conditions. Expect to be challenged, make sacrifices, and exist outside your comfort zone.

KIA is a nonpartisan, secular charity. Although for many there is a spiritual component to what we do, we remain nonreligious and favor no one philosophy. Out of necessity, we have partnered with many different religious groups over the years, but always with the understanding that religion and dentistry are two separate and different things, best not mixed. We take great pride in having a membership that is as diverse as it can get. Volunteers are welcome, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation or religious beliefs. All we ask is a willingness to work hard and from the heart, devoid of your own theological agenda.

A VOLUNTEER MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OLD BEFORE THE DEPARTURE DATE FOR A TRIP. Sorry, no exceptions for exceptional children. After all, aren't all of our children exceptional in our own eyes?

**Being chosen for a KIA team is a privilege, not a right. Completion and submission of a Destination Preference Form with the \$150.00 administration fee does not guarantee placement on a KIA team roster. Your \$150.00 donation, like any donation to a registered charity, is non-refundable.**

Despite every attempt to complete and fulfill all the bureaucratic hurdles for entry into the country of choice, including visas, practice permits, criminal background checks, etc., complications can and do arise. Last minute changes in entry requirements are a frequent occurrence. Proper completion of official paperwork in third world countries is often a moving target. Cooperation of the volunteer to provide additional documentation on short notice, when requested, is expected.

We bring most or all of our own equipment, disposable supplies, medicaments and instruments with us into the country. Foreign governments often request a thorough inventory of what we are bringing in, with serial numbers, expiry dates, and container weight. Despite the fact that we provide all this information if it is requested, clearing customs can still be problematic. Things get confiscated, often to be never seen again. The impact on the subsequent care delivered during your trip is impossible to predict.

Be very clear that transportation can be an adventure. Both the quality of the vehicles, be it plane, train or automobile, (or boat), is not always ideal. Neither are the roads, or the way the drivers negotiate them. Bus drivers have been known to cross themselves before traversing a rickety bridge over a

swollen river. Cancellations and delays of airline flights are totally beyond the control of KIA, the same is true for lost baggage. IT IS INCUMBENT UPON THE VOLUNTEER TO ACQUIRE FLIGHT DELAY AND CANCELLATION INSURANCE.

Accommodations are not five stars. In fact, if the room where you put your head down at night has any stars at all, that is a plus. Sharing a room is the norm, usually with one other volunteer, but sometimes you may snore in the same space with two or more others. Ants, spiders, scorpions, snakes and other critters may be occasional roommates as well. Hot shower? Bonus. Private bathroom? Bonus. No outside noise? Bonus. View? Always interesting. Having said all this, the quality of our accommodations is infinitely superior to those of the past. Ask any veteran.

Food. Do I really have to elaborate? If you are a picky eater, bring lots of granola bars. There is no way we can accurately predict the costs of eating, or whether or not you will find it palatable. One word: Dukoral. Swallowing like a duck can help. Or hold your nose. Consider hot sauce and salt, they make anything taste better.

Clinics are always an adventure. The facilities where we deliver care can be challenging. Power is unpredictable, even with generators. Usually we are swamped with patients, but if the local shaman or priest says we are removing life force when we extract a tooth, all of the theological debating in the world is not going to make the devotees show up. If something like this happens, chill. Treatment of patients might be at a local medical clinic, in a school or community hall. They may be on a bench, a stackable chair or a table outside with chickens and pigs running around. But not to worry, it's stifling hot and often very humid. Your underwear will feel like a diaper. Bugs abound, and the noise can be cacophonous. The portable dental equipment has been known to suddenly go kaput. Sometimes we set up at a locale and go back there every day, other times we move daily. Toilet facilities at clinic locations are rustic and often in need of maintenance. Outhouses and squatty potties are common, fragrant, and sometimes simply unusable. Remember to bring your own hand sanitizer and roll of toilet paper.

For non-dental volunteers – please be prepared for sights and sounds that you have never experienced before. As a non-dental volunteer you may be delegated to assist a dentist with oral surgery or possibly fillings, sterilizing dental instruments, run crowd control, help with triage, or patient education. Several of these assignments involve handling sharp, pointy dental instruments ... instruments that have been exposed to blood and saliva. Although extremely rare, accidents do happen. Be alert and pay attention. You may find the restraining techniques necessary to complete treatment on little children are, shall we say, memorable. Even though you are not professionally trained, KIA brigades could never function without people like you.

A one week trip is usually 4 days of clinic; a two week trip has 8. That is 4 to 8 days of very difficult back breaking work. Look within yourself and ask, "Can I keep up?" At the risk of sounding demanding, slackers need not apply. Prima Donnas denied. If you are high maintenance, please reconsider. We do not want quitters. If you bug out and abandon your team for any reason other than illness while on a trip, it is likely your last one with KIA. Take into consideration any personal health issues, as you may be a long ways away from modern health care.

YOUR GROUP LEADERS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH AFFILIATES WHO HAVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR DESTINATION, HAVE DONE THEIR BEST TO ESTIMATE THE LAND COSTS OF YOUR EXCURSION. THE KEY WORD HERE IS ESTIMATE. Sometimes the meals that we thought were included aren't. The bus driver decides that he wants more because diesel went up 50 pesos/litre. A custom official wants his palm greased. We need to purchase more supplies. On and on. Please bring extra cash to use as a contingency fund. If you feel the need to have an audited breakdown of the trip, please discuss the issue with your team leader before contacting the KIA executive.

**THE TREATMENTS DELIVERED DURING A KIA EXCURSION SHOULD BE DONE AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO THE STANDARD OF CARE AT HOME.** We make sure that none of our supplies or medicaments has expired by exceeding their code date. Obviously there are compromises that have to be made, such as the inability to diagnose and treat with radiographs. **ALL INSTRUMENTS USED DURING INVASIVE PROCEDURES MUST BE STERILIZED WITH STEAM UNDER PRESSURE, NO EXCEPTIONS.** Soaking in Genol is not an acceptable substitute.

**SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS MUST BE RESPECTED. IF YOU CAN'T DO A PROCEDURE AT HOME, YOU CAN'T DO IT ON A KIA TRIP.** For example: only dentists can extract teeth, RDA's can't suture, school teachers never inject local anaesthetic. Every effort should be made to establish informed consent. **TREATMENTS MUST BE ACCEPTED BY THE PATIENT, NOT FORCED UPON THEM.** You are not going on a trip to establish a new high for the number of teeth extracted in a day for the Guinness Book of Records. PLEASE DON'T BE OBSESSED BY NUMBERS. If you have to wait for instruments to complete sterilization, relax. There is always something else to do.

Bins and equipment. Only make an issue out of this requirement when you have decided you are not going on any further KIA trips. If you feel that all what you have perused is acceptable, and you pay your deposit, you are part of a team. Not just the immediate brigade that you are traveling with, but the whole Kindness In Action collective. You will likely be required to take two (2) pieces of checked in baggage with you. One will be your personal things, and the other will be KIA dental. It could be a Rubbermaid bin full of dental supplies, a piece of dental equipment, or a bin of school supplies and clothes. Obviously, most of the supplies will be used up during the excursion, and there will be less returning home than went. BUT EVERY VOLUNTEER COMMITS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING HOME A KIA CONTAINER, AND TO GET IT TO THE POST OFFICE **IMMEDIATELY** UPON ARRIVAL BACK AT HOME. It has to get back to our supply depot for cleaning, restocking, and repair. PRONTO. We turn it around for subsequent groups going out. Often we don't have a lot of time to complete a turnaround. If your group leader assigns a bin to you, there is no debate. You committed to transport a bin there and back when you signed on the dotted line. Post KIA travel, or the size of your car, or a bad back, or a specialty degree, or the phase of the moon are not excuses. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR GETTING A KIA CONTAINER HOME, AND TO MAIL TO BACK TO REDWATER OR CALGARY ON THE **1<sup>ST</sup> BUSINESS DAY YOU GET BACK.** KIA will reimburse you for any fees incurred, upon receiving the invoice. You had your fun, make sure others have theirs.

Organizing the travel arrangements for several hundred individuals on the many different teams that we send out annually can be a daunting task. There is the additional complexity of many of you wanting to

enjoy some extra time after your KIA commitment is over, as a tourist. We have had a close and successful relationship with our affiliated travel agent for years. She is committed to getting the best rate possible, under the constraints of booking a group. THE DYNAMICS OF BOOKING A GROUP OF TRAVELERS WHO HAVE A VARIETY OF STARTING POINTS, AND WHO WE WANT TO ARRIVE AT THEIR KIA DESTINATION TOGETHER AT THE SAME TIME, IS MUCH DIFFERENT THAN ORGANIZING A JOURNEY FOR YOURSELF. SO PLEASE DON'T TELL US THAT YOU WENT ONLINE AND COULD FIND TICKETS FOR LESS THAN WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN QUOTED. We have heard it before, and it doesn't matter. **YOU CAN NOT BOOK AIRLINE TICKETS ON YOUR OWN.** ALL AIRLINE TICKETS FOR A KIA EXCURSION ARE BOOKED THROUGH THE KIA TRAVEL AGENT. **DO NOT PLAN VACATION TIME IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO YOUR KIA MISSION.** The reason is to have the team arrive to clear customs and get picked up all at the same time. If you want to holiday, you must do so AFTER the dental mission is over. The KIA travel agent will only book airline tickets to the country where you are working and your return ticket home. She will not be involved in any aspects of your post-KIA holiday, except to book your return tickets after your travels. She will be able to book your departure to coordinate with your post-clinic holiday plans. Air Miles and other travel points cannot be used for KIA travel.

Verbal or written abuse of the travel agent will not be tolerated. If such a situation should arise, it could result in immediate dismissal from the team, with no refunds of donations made. Our travel agent is much more important to the functioning of KIA than any individual volunteer.

That brings us to the subject of refunds. **THERE ARE NONE.** Any monies sent to KIA by a volunteer are considered a donation to a charity registered with Revenue Canada. KIA will issue a tax receipt for the amount donated. Returning the donation after the fact, regardless of the circumstances, puts our status as a registered charity at risk. The charitable receipt must match the name on the donation cheque. Donations are not transferable between individual volunteers.

We now live in an age of internet, social media, and smartphones. When you sign up for a KIA brigade you do so with the understanding that photos or videos taken of you during clinic can be placed on our website or Facebook page without the need for your permission. You also agree not to post any images of others taken away from the clinic without getting prior approval from the people involved.

A Kindness in Action excursion is much more than a trip to an impoverished, third world country, to fill, clean, and extract teeth. It is an adventure of a lifetime, that will change your world view forever. People who volunteer for such an endeavor tend to be unique, proven by the fact that they are willing to do what they do. After spending a week or two with like minded teammates, whose sole purpose for participating is to selflessly help those less fortunate than themselves, special bonds are formed. This is manifested by the number of KIA "repeat offenders", or KIA "lifers". It is similar to the bonds that are formed between the players on a championship sports club, or soldiers who have been in combat together. In a way, they will always be brothers and sisters. Interestingly, the KIA groups are often called teams, or brigades. We all can learn from the patience and dignity that our KIA patients show. Their appreciation is clearly expressed, even though there is often a language barrier. You just don't get such sincere gratitude on a day to day basis back home. It's tough to return, and ask someone "How is it going?". The complaints that you hear are very often seem trivial, and material. The life situations of the

locals who we provide care for, opens one's eyes to how fortunate we really are to be able to live where we do. What is really important in the big scheme of things becomes more focused. The overall picture becomes clearer, because of the global exposure a KIA trip gives. You tend to not sweat the small stuff so much.

Try it, you just might like it. By changing other people's lives, you can't help but change your own.