

# The Value of Volunteering

*Volunteering provides valuable service to society and a great amount of satisfaction for the physician volunteer.*

**V**olunteerism is the policy or practice of giving time or talents for charitable, educational, or other worthwhile activities, especially in your community. By definition, volunteering is an altruistic activity intended to promote goodness or improve quality of life. In return, this activity can produce a feeling of self-worth and respect. There is no financial gain involved for the individual. Volunteering is also known for skill development, socialization and fun.

Skills-based volunteering is leveraging the specialized skills and talents of individuals to strengthen the infrastructure of nonprofits, helping them build and sustain their capacity to successfully achieve their missions. Many volunteers are specifically trained in the areas in which they work, such as medicine or education. Others serve on an as needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster.

Several of us were brought up in environments in which volunteering was a routine part of life; while for others, volunteering is a learned activity. Either way, the benefits are easily recognized. When you engage, it can help clarify who you are and consolidate your personal values as you contribute for the benefit of others.

You can volunteer in a health system or professional society, or you can volunteer to help with a variety of community services—local, regional, national, or international. Some would say both types of

volunteerism are equal in importance, while others would make a distinction. I believe any type of volunteering holds value.

“A noble leader answers not to the trumpet calls of self-promotion, but to the hushed whispers of necessity.”

— MOLLIE MARTI

“The interior joy we feel when we have done a good deed is the nourishment the soul requires. Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it. Remember, you do not live in a world all of your own.”

— ALBERT SCHWEITZER

When you are providing a contribution to a worthwhile endeavor, there are benefits for you as well as those you are helping. The value achieved does not need to have quantifiable parameters and should not necessarily require objective assessments from disengaged external reviewers.

I do agree, however, that there needs to be some form of data (qualitative and quantitative) available to help volunteers decide when, where, or how they can provide meaningful volunteer work. I also believe that only providing a financial contribution is not truly volunteerism. Certainly, financial contributions help create important and significant change in our society. But active participation in volunteerism means making an impact yourself and observing true change.

So what does volunteerism actually entail for a healthcare professional? This is a complex question to answer.

Traditional approaches include participating on committees, helping to develop educational courses, and engaging with thought leadership initiatives. These are all still important. Many pursue these for academic advancement, while others desire to contribute back to

benefit the organization from an altruistic perspective. At the end of the day, however, both are equally important, and it is critical to recognize that a sense of community is often the primary motivating factor for everyone.

It is also engaging to learn from others when it comes to volunteerism. There are fascinating stories to share and opportunities to learn about new initiatives. Often, there is a fresh type of activity that one would never have considered if not through the simple act of sharing. Sharing and engaging with each other is where a sense of community can arise and flourish.

Is volunteering valuable? The answer is a simple “yes.” Participate in what is meaningful for you and use the skills that you are best able to provide. The benefits are mutual for the receiver and the provider. Try it; you’ll like it.

At some level, all physicians can be considered leaders. And leaders often give back to our society when an opportunity is available.