



## **Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness in the Delivery of International Health Care**

Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive/negative, better /worse, right/wrong. In other words, it simply means that you are aware that people are not all the same and that you recognize that your practices or culture are no better than any other.

By being culturally aware in the medical field, one can understand and appreciate the social skills that allow providers to work and treat individuals from cultures other than their own. It involves a mindfulness and acceptance of cultural differences, knowledge of a patient's culture, and adaptation of skills, as well as self-awareness of one's behavior in that particular surrounding.

Why is self-awareness so important during an international medical trip? Once you have been accepted onto a medical mission trip with MLP, you immediately become a representative for what MLP stands for- international medical service. With international medical travel comes the responsibility of respecting the various cultures you will interact with during your MLP medical mission trip.

Being mindful of the way you dress and the way you socialize/ interact with locals and those from your team are important factors in projecting a professional image. Therefore, it is not only essential, but expected, that each person traveling with MLP will uphold the same values that the MLP team considers essential for a successful medical mission trip:

- Respect of the local custom(s) and culture(s)
- Being aware of one's own behavior and conduct
- Understanding that participants are serving as representatives of MLP
- Communication through cultural understanding and respect of patients is essential in providing appropriate health care. Every health care encounter provides an opportunity to have a positive effect on patient health and relations. MLP participants can make the most of this by learning more about the culture of the region they will be traveling to.