



**DENVER
HEALTH™**
— est. 1860 —
FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY

January 25, 2019

RE: Letter of Support for ME to WE Volunteer Trips

To Whom This May Concern,

It is no exaggeration to say that, as a doctor, one of the most important and monumental experiences of my medical career was the time I spent in Kishon Hospital working with the WE organization to train local doctors in the community.

Personally, I believe that training local doctors provides an important way to build local capacity within the community. This skill-based service is a vitally important element for anyone aiming to provide world-class healthcare. Overall, this was an equitable learning experience providing a hand-up to communities in a way that provides long-term sustainable development – not a hand out or short-term band-aid solution.

Doctors like myself often came from some of the most well-funded medical schools in the world. Considering this background, it was a privilege to work with experienced doctors in Kenya who had a wealth of talent, but had not always been able to access those same resources I did. The chance to learn from international doctors is a professional development opportunity afforded to all doctors in North America, and I strongly believe doctors in rural Kenya should be given the same learning opportunities in their career. As well, I believe every doctor needs ongoing training in order to evolve and expand their skill-base – we are incredibly fortunate to have such systems in place in North America; but this is harder to accomplish overseas, especially with pace of technology advancement. We were able to lend critical diagnostic knowledge and awareness of best practices relating to all aspects of a holistic healthcare institution. Sharing some of the latest advancements in the field of medicine that hadn't yet been put into place there yet was a vital way to build capacity, and had a real impact on the care many patients received.

During my time practicing in Narok County, I learned far more than I'd first expected when I set off for Kenya. Although I was certainly able to share plenty of my own expertise with the doctors I worked alongside, it absolutely was a knowledge exchange, with both sides coming away having learned so much. The opportunity to learn side-by-side with many incredible doctors was one that I am tremendously thankful for. This was the definition of an equitable learning experience, and rather than focusing on short-term emergency aid, this program took a sustainable approach to healthcare and set communities up for long-term success. I know that it is often the case that foreign doctors fly into a country and exclusively deliver aid to patients directly, without any attempt at shared-learning. I chose WE's program because of their skilled global service approach and commitment to sustained development within communities – one doctor teaching many local doctors who can then pass this knowledge on to others in the community is an extremely efficient way to exponentially increase local capacity within the hospital.

Dentistry and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery

301 W. 6th Ave., MC0242

Denver, Colorado 80204

Phone 303-602-8200

Fax 303-602-8206



**DENVER
HEALTH™**

— est. 1860 —
FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY

Even more remarkable, not far from Kishon Hospital the new WE College is preparing to open its own school of medicine, which will be training young Kenyans to take up this mantle and continue to provide quality care to the more than 30,000 patients who rely on WE's healthcare facilities and mobile health units in the region. The opportunity for Western doctors to teach the next generation of medical professionals in rural Kenya through this program will set communities up for true, long-term sustainable development in unprecedented ways, and I couldn't be more proud of my affiliation with WE.

I was thrilled to see similar programming across the board in WE's initiatives in the Maasai Mara. The WE College is training the next generation of Kenyan nurses and lab technicians. And this skills-based exchange goes far beyond healthcare. Student teachers from Canada are working in classrooms built by community members and WE. Agricultural experts are teaching best practises to local farmers, ensuring that their crops are as sustainable, nutritious, and drought-resistant as possible.

The experience was the ultimate skills-based exchange, and a true example of capacity building within local communities. Each day I worked at Baraka, I was able to meet the many people who rely on this facility face to face. From expectant mothers in the maternity ward to children coming in for their first-ever checkup, people rely on this work. Unfortunately, it's become commonplace for some North American's who have never experienced this programming to criticize it as aid that is simply driven by the west. This is a damaging opinion that simply doesn't reflect WE's work, and furthermore, undermines the agency of the communities that WE partners with who not only welcome these projects, but actively shape them and work to ensure they are sustainable. This is not a give and take relationship, but a true equitable partnership.

Sincerely,

Christopher Henes, DDS
General Practice Residency Director
Denver Health

Dentistry and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery

301 W. 6th Ave., MC0242

Denver, Colorado 80204

Phone 303-602-8200

Fax 303-602-8206