



ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL LACOR

Lacor Hospital Ethical Considerations and Cultural Information for Visitors

**The best possible treatment,
to the highest number of people,
at the lowest possible cost**

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Section One Your role as a visitor

Welcome

Thank you for applying for an experience at St. Mary's Hospital Lacor.

Whether you are going as a medical student, an intern, or as part of a project team, we encourage you to read this document even before the Hospital's final decision regarding your application.

English is the language used in Lacor Hospital.

If this document is too difficult for you to read and understand, we advise you not to apply for this experience, as it would be hard for you to live and work in Lacor Hospital. Even more importantly, the likelihood for misunderstandings would be significant and might inadvertently cause harm.

If this is your first Ugandan experience, it is important for you to have an understanding of the cultural and **ethical** behavior required at Lacor Hospital.

If you are an undergraduate student, please bear in mind that you are only allowed to **observe**. Yours is a **formative** experience, aimed at enriching yourself both personally and professionally. Any medical act (diagnostic, curative or other) will only be allowed under the strict responsibility and supervision of a medical officer or specialist, who is responsible for any harm you might cause.

Always remember: if you are not allowed to do it in your home Country, you can't do it in Uganda either.

It is important that you understand and accept that **you cannot "make even a small difference" if you are there for only a few months**. The context is too different, the diseases, diagnostics and treatments are too different: you would probably be leaving just when you could actually start contributing to the work. This experience is an opportunity to further your education, to help you become a better professional with greater intercultural awareness, and to appreciate this opportunity to learn more about the world, the privileges you were born in, the opportunity of making a difference in your future career and, perhaps, to understand yourself better.

The hospital staff is severely overburdened and overstretched with work and cannot afford to spend time on receiving and helping or tutor you and other visitors.

To better understand this, we recommend you watch this documentary "[First, Do No Harm: A Quality Research Documentary](#)".

Role and obligations

If you go to Lacor, remember that you are a guest of the Hospital as well as of the support organization which connected you to the Hospital. Both are locally very respected organizations. As a foreigner, you will stand out: people will assume that you are associated with the Hospital and the Foundation and will expect you to behave according to their values.

You can find more information on rules and personal safety in our "[Lacor Visitor Resource Information](#)".

As a guest, you should always be respectful towards the new environment and its people.

As a resident in the guest-house you should treat the staff and spaces with respect and politeness. You are not allowed to invite external people, without asking the opinion/permission of the other residents and of the guesthouse head of staff. Lacor Hospital and its support organizations adhere to a non-discrimination policy in regard to race, colour, religion (creed), sex, disability, marital status, national origin, etc.

We expect you to be respectful of the values of the Hospital and its community.

The ideal candidate

Whoever applies for an experience at Lacor Hospital should embody the following key attitudes: **respect, openness, empathy, curiosity and humility**. These imply a willingness to leave one's comfort zone. You are entering a new workplace, which might have a very different workplace etiquette from the one you are used to.

- Be respectful: this includes being courteous, patient and understanding with everyone.
- Always keep an **open mind** and a **collaborative** attitude towards teamwork.
- Be **sensible** and behave appropriately as you are in a Catholic faith-based context.
- Have good communication skills and maintain a positive learning attitude.
- Be aware of the intensity of the workload and be prepared to endure days of long and stressful shifts alternating with periods of less productivity.
- Be aware that **flexibility** and **adaptability** are essential qualities to learning and working in a very different context from yours.
- Any form of racism and racial prejudice, even if thinly veiled, are obviously unacceptable.
- **Raising one's voice is considered insulting and is not tolerated.**
- The commitment to an ethically rigorous and irreproachable attitude towards everyone is required, even after working hours and outside the hospital. Good manners and professionalism are required in a respectful working context as is the commitment to understanding and fully respecting local cultural sensibilities. Believers of any faith and non-believers are equally welcome, but tolerance is equally required from all candidates.
- Always be mindful of the context and its diversity. Living within a project 24/7 makes it really hard to separate work and personal life. However, **sobriety** and a sense of **responsibility** are required even during your free time. Creating and nurturing positive relationships with staff members while maintaining a professional attitude is expected. To **value diversity** rather than confrontation it is a great start to building important and lasting relationships anywhere.
- It is important to always remember that you are a "**temporary guest**": do not presume to change anything in the short time you are here. Changes take years to occur and depend on a multitude of factors, requirements and power dynamics. You might contribute to some change, but you are not likely to see it!
- Keep in mind that any relationship between you and most local people will imply a significant economic inequality. You will probably receive requests for financial help; you can of course decide to help someone, be aware that it will be considered a gift, not a loan.

Workwise, you are required to:

- respect work shifts and schedules, be available and flexible in case of staff absences and be able to handle stressful situations.
- The hospital staff is legally responsible for all aspects of patient treatment. Always remember that your actions are strictly limited to what you are allowed to do.
- Understanding and accepting the diversity of workplace professional culture is essential to relating constructively with the hospital staff. You can only see the tip of the iceberg: most of what determines behaviors and actions, in ourselves as in others, lies beneath the surface and can only be perceived through patience and empathy, and through long term relationships. If you criticize, especially if you criticize a specific person or his/her actions, you will be perceived as yet another rude and insulting expatriate who talks without understanding.
- Never criticize, but take note and ask your head of department or your expatriate contact person about it later, in private, so that you can better understand what occurred.

- Remember to regularly update the communication manager of your support organization. This is a crucial part of the reason you are in Lacor: to **observe, bear witness and share your experience with the Italian communication officer.**

Remember that as with most countries different from your own, relationships with children, food, life and death, with what one considers essential in terms of food, hygiene and countless other aspects may be very different from your own.

Be open, have a learning attitude rather than a judgmental one which inevitably brings prejudice. You will not like everything, but you will definitely notice how your own life and society overflows with the superfluous.

Not everything will seem right or correct, based on your standards, but whenever you see anything that looks “wrong” to you, always consider that this is usually the best option that can be taken in difficult circumstances. Consider also that even the smallest change takes time in any organization; kindness and patience are even more needed in large, complex and long-standing organizations. The right thing to do is to speak with the head of department or directors at the first private occasion and ask to understand.

If you have read the above requirements and feel you can accept and adapt, **please ask yourself these questions and answer as honestly as possible:**

- Do you have a clear reason for going to Lacor? Do you want to get to know a new and different reality?
- What are your reasons for seeking an experience outside your own country?
- Why do you wish to experience your profession in such a distant and different context?
- How do you expect the experience to change you personally and professionally?
- Are you open to an exchange, a comparison between cultures, knowledge, habits?
- What do you think you can gain professionally from an experience in a resource constrained setting?
- What is the most challenging experience you have had so far in your professional life and how did you get through it?
- What do you think could be the hardest part of this experience?
- What are you going to say or do if you see something that you believe to be wrong?

Privacy and Media Policy

In this era of social media and smartphones that take better pictures than old professional cameras and allow everyone to become a photographer with a story to tell, it is important to be aware of the Hospital’s code of conduct. Communication has a central role in a hospital, and any kind of written, photographic, video or other forms of documentation are a precious and integral part of a volunteer’s role for the organization involved.

Nevertheless, **you are not within a public space**, therefore it is mandatory to comply with the **Hospital’s and your support organization’s rules and code of conduct.**

As in your home country, always obtain the consent of persons you wish to include in a picture or video (inside and outside the Hospital) and **RESPECT A PERSON’S RIGHT TO REFUSE.** If they say NO, or if they do not readily smile back in obvious consent, it means NO. Taking a picture without the subject’s consent, or despite their lack of evident signs of acceptance, is an abuse.

Communication guidelines for taking photos/videos or publishing stories on personal blogs or contact lists (extract):

In each message (text, audio, video, photograph), the Foundation ensures that respect for Lacor, its staff and its patients is safeguarded through observing the following:

- RESPECT the dignity of people, their culture and their work. Enhance professionalism, commitment, value, dedication.
- AVOID using images or terms with a high emotional impact, which leverage feelings of pietism.
- AVOID forms of communication that emphasize conditions of extreme poverty, suffering and illness of adults and children, which is contrary to the dignity of the people. Ask yourself: I I were in that condition, would I accept having a foreigner take my picture, for whatever reason?
- TAKE INTO ACCOUNT the point of view of a Ugandan reader: your Ugandan colleagues would consider it unacceptable to be identified uniquely as a sick and miserable population, in permanent need of charity: this is the message that you can inadvertently give if the only pictures you use are those that shock, surprise, disturb you.
- UNDERLINE the competence and effectiveness of local operators and the results they obtain with the financial support from donors. Although extremely generous and precious, all the support very far from being comparable to that of a western hospital: communicate the commitment and capacity of the staff and portray, with their consent, patients who have been restored to health, also thanks to the donors' support.

Clinical Photography

If you need to take a picture for clinical/documentation reasons, you must strictly follow these rules:

- a **written consent is mandatory**. Patients can withdraw their consent at any time and in that case their pictures MUST be deleted. Medical photography requests should not be repeated if the patient is reluctant or unwilling¹.
- Always explain why you are taking the picture and its use (ie, publication on a journal/blog/textbook).
- Always take pictures without identifying characteristics (ex: face, birthmarks, etc.). "The minimum area of the body should be photographed"².
- ¹ Al Balushi, A. A. (2019). *The Ethics and Legality of Using Personal Smartphones to take Medical Photographs*. *Sultan Qaboos University Medical Journal*, 19(2), e99
- ² Creighton, S., Alderson, J., Brown, S., & Minto, C. L. (2002). *Medical photography: ethics, consent and the intersex patient*. *BJU international*, 89(1), 67-71.
- Ethical clinical photography demands that clinical photographers protect patient data and confidentiality and that they preserve the integrity of patient records.
- Clinical photos should be stored safely with a restricted access, especially in case of personal smartphone use. Make sure the images cannot be accessed when you show or share your personal pictures, or if your smartphone is stolen.¹

A person who requires or seeks medical attention depends on his / her doctor for medical care: this determines a power imbalance that can put pressure on patients into agreeing when they would otherwise refuse to have their photo taken.

Many health conditions carry social stigma that might cause very real negative consequences on your subject's life. You are in Lacor Hospital for a short time to observe or help: think about the repercussions your words and actions could have on those who remain, long after you are gone.

Social Media

Although we cannot prevent you from posting on our social media, we do expect you to post content that is compliant with our media policy. Simply put, respect the hospital and the people who are there, for whatever reason. **Avoid posting photos of sick people especially children that are clearly suffering, heart-breaking captions, communications indicating that you are contributing to saving lives or otherwise making a difference: it would be untrue. Honor the local professionals' achievements and the happiness of health restored.**

The following ironic video should give you an idea: [How \(NOT\) To Get More Likes On Social Media](#)

Section Two Daily life

Glimpses of different perceptions and priorities

Relationships and Solidarity

Relationships in Africa involve concepts of **solidarity, hospitality, sharing of resources, frequent interaction and living as a community.**

Solidarity and sense of community are acted upon on a daily basis. In contrast to most Western societies, African societies are rooted in the concept of **interdependence** among members of a community.

Social solidarity permeates many, if not every, aspect of the everyday life and is closely tied to the concept of **Respect.**

Understanding Time

For western culture “being on time” is a sign of respect; consequently, being late is considered disrespectful. Many reasons can make someone late for work: some may need to dig the fields before work, others may have to walk over long distances. **In Uganda, good relationships are more important than almost anything else; preventing conflict is therefore just as important.**

There can be a huge disconnect in terms of what constitutes “good behavior”. In western culture, relationships and the common good are less important than personal gratification and achievement, irrespective of the effect this has on others; in Uganda **relationships are paramount.**

Foreigners often feel they should openly remark on perceived unprofessional attitudes, such as being late for work, or the lack of equipment to perform a task. This is considered very disrespectful behavior: everyone knows that there is usually a very good or even an unavoidable reason and openly commenting on this is very bad manners. Even worse, if the expatriate uses a **forceful attitude and strong words**, this **is considered an insult almost as bad as a physical aggression.** To avoid escalation, the local staff will do their best to defuse the tension by ignoring or laughing it off, which the foreigner will interpret as disrespect or derision.

Respect and relationships have an impact on every aspect of life: as you are the visitor, it is your duty to make the greatest effort to understand, before erroneously taking for granted attitudes and their meaning and expecting the Hospital staff to understand you.

Formality

Formality is highly valued, and is a sign of respect. Until you are better acquainted with the local norms in different settings and whenever in doubt, it is **always better to be overly formal** to show appreciation and respect towards the people you meet.

Work relationships

Relationships are paramount in the African context. This is reflected in the **Formality** and **Respect** that are the foundations of social structure and hierarchy and can be expressed differently from what you are used to³. **Pay attention to these interactions:**

- **the way you greet someone is the first sign of respect.** Unless told otherwise, try to be as formal as you can. In order to avoid any social awkwardness, wait for your interlocutors to greet you first so that you can follow their lead, paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal interactions.
- **use the appropriate names or titles** that reflect the social rank of others, both in face- to-face interaction and in public reference (ie remember to keep using the title “doctor” or “sister” before the name of a doctor or of a nurse, even if you are on friendly terms with them).
- **dressing appropriately for your and others’ social position** (see below).
- **showing extreme respect to the elderly.** Older people are considered wiser and their opinions are highly valued.
- appropriately showing, or refraining from showing, emotions, especially anger. **Public display of anger is NEVER ACCEPTABLE.** Even if you feel highly frustrated, always avoid showing anger and raising your voice. Contrary to many western cultures, a **display of anger is a show of weakness and inability to control one’s temper and will make you lose the respect of your observers.** It is unacceptable, whatever the reason, especially since it is often a misunderstanding of social norms and behavior. Seek your contact person/ head of department at a later, private time and discuss the episode with him/her.
- when agreeing on a meeting or task, avoid stating a specific time or manner: if your interlocutors cannot be available that time or cannot execute that task, some might be unable to say “no, I can’t be there at that time / I cannot do it”, especially if the question is forcefully stated. They might not answer, or might accept out of politeness. They will be absent at the agreed upon time, or the task will not be done. It will not be their fault: it is your duty, as a visitor who will soon go away, to understand them. They have no duty to spend time and effort instructing all the short-term newcomers who are unwilling to understand local norms and automatically impose their own. The best option is to ask open-ended questions “what time/date would suit you”? and to carefully explore how that task can be done, in order to allow difficult or impossible aspects to emerge.

Dress code

Appropriate dressing, especially elegance, is synonymous with showing respect. Ugandan medical students, most doctors and specialists wear button down shirts with long sleeves and formal outfits at work: presenting yourself in a t-shirt and ripped jeans would be considered a sign of disrespect towards your colleagues and teachers, as well as to your patients. You can wear a polo or a button-down shirt with short sleeves.

Do not enter the Hospital in shorts or short skirts, tank tops, displaying ostentatious cleavages, or wearing sandals or crocs.