

# Who is the Hero of This Story?

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT GLOBAL HEALTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

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### The CONCORD Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.<sup>(2006)</sup>

- Choice of images and messages will be made based on the paramount principles of --
  - In all communications and where practical and reasonable within the need to reflect reality, strive to --
- 1 Respect for the dignity of the people concerned.
  - 2 Belief in the equality of all people.
  - 3 Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity, and justice.
- 1 Choose images and related messages based on values of respect equality, solidarity, and justice.
  - 2 Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development.
  - 3 Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise, or discriminate against people, situations, or places.
  - 4 Use images, messages, and case studies with the full understanding, participation, and permission (or subjects' parents/guardian) of the subjects.
  - 5 Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves.
  - 6 Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly.
  - 7 Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of the vulnerable people.
  - 8 Conform to the highest standards in relation to children's rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); as children are the subjects most frequently portrayed.

## CONCLUSION

Communication about global health projects and programming has a difficult and complex history. Intentional holistic training is needed for new students, faculty, and staff engaging in this work in order to better avoid and navigate missteps.

Seed Global Health is an organization that has utilized and expanded upon existing tools to proactively engage staff and educators in thinking carefully about the messaging they create and disseminate. The aim is to honor communities served; show respect for colleagues, friends, and others; and enhance partnerships to improve health for all across countries and diverse contexts.

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## Background.

Communication is critical to raising awareness, celebrating successes, highlighting challenges, advocating for issues, and galvanizing support for needed investments in global health.

Yet, messaging about global health efforts among organizations, funders, media, and even academics has a troubled history. The language and visuals used often underscore a problematic narrative—one of poverty, disease, and hopelessness—about communities at the heart of health interventions.

The net effect is that the content shared exploits the very people programs are designed to aid and may implicitly condone white saviorism. Additionally, sharing images of patients and/or publicly posting the details of clinical and/or academic projects across digital media can cause unintended harm to communities, colleagues, and partners. It erodes trust and can potentially jeopardize long-term partnerships.

## The Need for Intentional Focus and Training on Global Health Communications.

Careful thought in the creation of global health programming and impact messaging may help prevent the unintentional perpetuation of stereotypes about populations abroad. It can transform the prevailing narrative that is rooted in colonialism and upheld by systemic racism, both of which have influenced the design of global health itself.

When sending staff, faculty, and trainees to partner countries, advanced training on missteps in global health communication, the history of "poverty porn," and the implicit biases these types of messaging communicate should be provided. They should also review established principles of communication and codes of conduct considered to be standards of practice and understand the need for conscientious inclusion of all partners in the development and ownership of communication materials. This includes academic publications, reports, and success stories among others.

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## Seed Global Health's Intentional Training Approach:

Conduct dedicated training with new educators and staff on communication approach.

Discuss the history of global health communication missteps.

Review existing principles around communication.

Ask "Who is the Hero of This Story?"

Abide by the Golden Rule—do not share patient information from countries abroad that would not be shared of patients within the United States.

Share the critical importance of thoughtful messaging to preserving and protecting relationships with partners.

Consider carefully authorship/ownership of academic publications.

Discuss practical applications/examples.