

ANNOTATION

THE QUINTESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FIELD HEALTH

“Where There Is No Doctor,” a field manual for public health and emergency medical treatment used by Peace Corps Volunteers for years, celebrates 50 years in 2023. Read more on p. 36.

1973

Year of First Edition

(Spanish)

5,000,000

Number of

Books Sold

221

Countries Using

the Book

1977

Year of First Edition

(English)

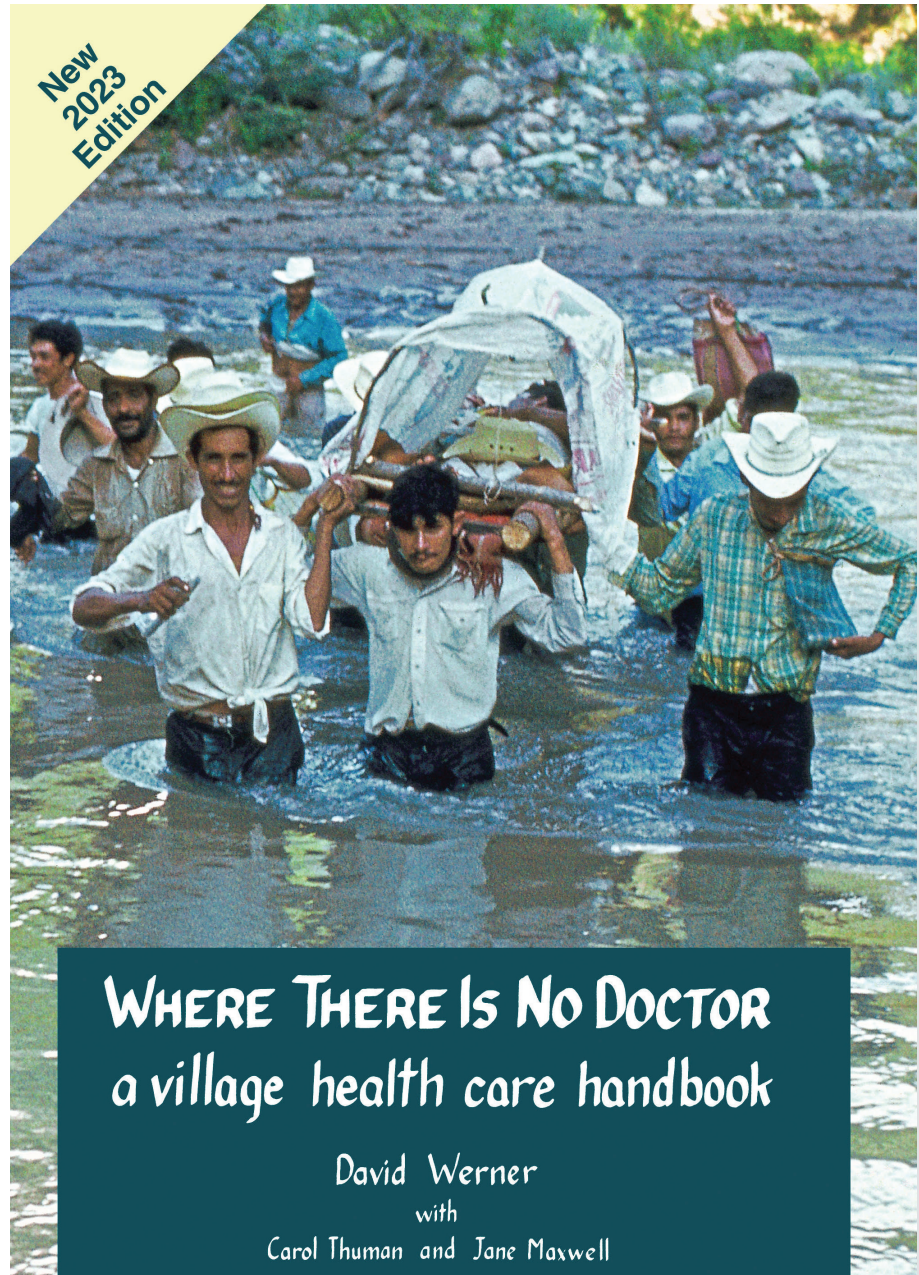
Countless

Number of Copies

Distributed to

Peace Corps

Volunteers



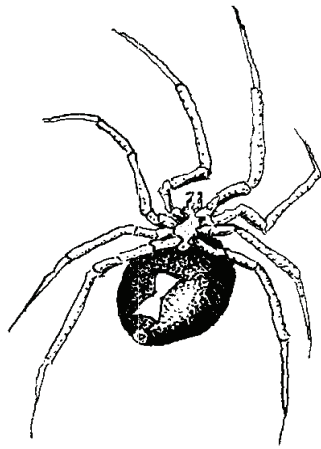
WHERE THERE IS NO DOCTOR

a village health care handbook

David Werner
with
Carol Thuman and Jane Maxwell

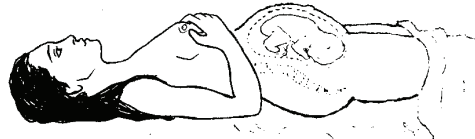
LIFE SAVER

When **Laura Kettel Khan**, a volunteer in Honduras is bitten by a dangerous spider, she says the guide “saved her life.”

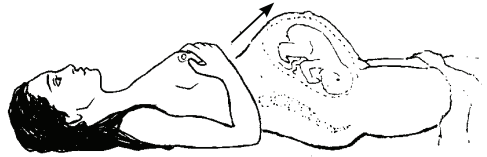


Labor pains are caused by contractions or tightening of the womb.

Between contractions the womb is relaxed like this:



During contractions, the womb tightens and lifts up like this:



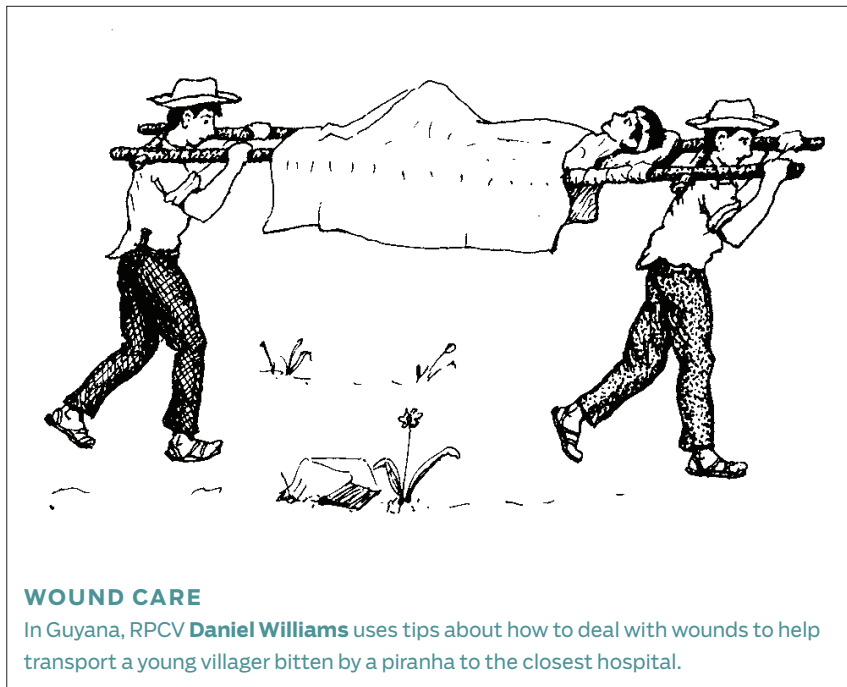
DELIVERY GUIDE

Jodi Hammer, who served in Ecuador, helps advise the near-delivery of a baby on a bus with what she learned in the book.



CLEAR AND CONCISE

Melinda Glines, a health education trainer in Fiji, recalls the usefulness of simple illustrations to help those in the community with basic education levels.



WOUND CARE

In Guyana, RPCV **Daniel Williams** uses tips about how to deal with wounds to help transport a young villager bitten by a piranha to the closest hospital.

2. WITH POWDERED CEREAL AND SALT

(Powdered rice is best. Or use finely ground maize, wheat flour, sorghum, or cooked and mashed potatoes.)

In 1 liter of WATER

put half a teaspoon of SALT

and 8 heaping teaspoons (or 2 handfuls) of powdered CEREAL.



Boil for 5 to 7 minutes to form a liquid gruel or watery porridge. Cool the Drink quickly and start giving it to the child.

SIMPLE SYRUP

RPCV **Laura Goldman** learns how to diagnose dehydration in a small child, then how to mix water, sugar (or honey), and salt into a rehydration solution in Ecuador.

Department of D.I.Y.

The essential field guide to health “Where There Is No Doctor” Celebrates 50 Years

BY S.L. BACHMAN

WHEN JODI HAMMER TRAINED to serve as a community health worker specializing in child and maternal health in Ecuador in 1994, she learned about nutrition, malnourishment in children, and how to identify and treat common health conditions in the absence of health clinics or medical professionals to staff them. One lesson covered the basics of delivering a baby.

The Peace Corps gave her a copy of “Where There Is No Doctor”, a basic health guide especially for people living far from doctors or medical facilities. Living in Urcuqui, a village in the highlands of the Andes Mountains, Hammer kept her copy of the book in her backpack at all times.

Except one day, when she climbed onto a public bus going into the regional capital. Dodging the chickens in the center aisle, she wedged herself into a seat by the window and settled in for the long ride.

Suddenly, she heard a commotion. “I looked up and saw one of my mothers’ group mothers, very pregnant, hoisting herself onto the bus all alone to go to the hospital to have her baby. She was already having regular contractions.”

Hammer hurried over to the woman and persuaded the other passengers to let her lie on the front seat while the bus lum-

I thought, I am going to be delivering a baby here on this bus, overfilled with passengers and their livestock, including this squealing pig on top...”

—Jodi Hammer (Ecuador 1994-96)

bered from stop to stop, loading on board passengers and their baggage, including live animals going to market.

“I was timing her contractions with my little watch, and I thought, *Where’s my “Where There Is No Doctor”?* It was the one time I didn’t have it with me! I thought, *What are the odds...?*”

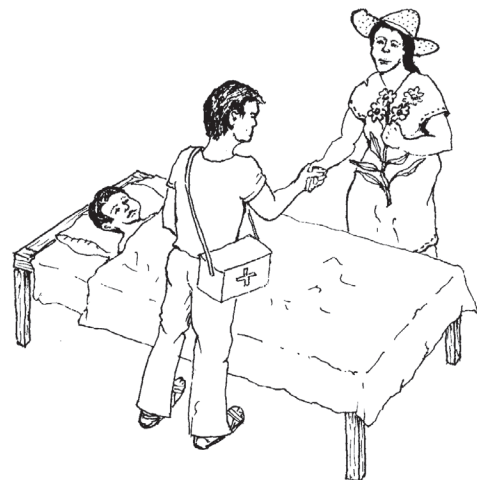
The bus stopped again and again, loading more passengers and cargo—including a hog-tied, squealing pig. “I’ll never forget looking up and seeing a pig being hoisted up on the roof... I thought, *I am going to be delivering a baby here on this bus, overfilled with passengers and their livestock, including this squealing pig on top...*”

Hammer called out to the driver. “I said *señor, señor!* I will pay you all the missed fares, but this woman needs to get to the hospital!” The driver skipped some of his usual stops, and the bus arrived at the hospital before the woman delivered her baby. Hammer, exhausted, vowed to make sure that every day afterwards, when

she picked up her backpack and headed out the door, she would first double-check that it contained her copy of “Where There Is No Doctor”.

Bringing health information to people in remote places using easily understood language and illustrations

has been the mission of “Where There Is No Doctor” since the early 1970s, when the first Spanish-language edition of the famed health manual was published. That edition, as well as the English edition, have become well known to Peace Corps volunteers worldwide as a resource and



“Work with traditional healers—not against them. Learn from them and encourage them to learn from you.”

guide for their own health care and the health of people in local communities.

Through the decades, Peace Corps volunteers have at times formally received the book as a part of their kit before being sent into the field. At other times, volunteers have been informally advised that the book might be useful. Some volunteers have first encountered copies already on the shelves of community health centers far off the beaten track.

The nonprofit publisher behind “Where There Is No Doctor”, Hesperian Health Guides, reports that the book has been used in 221 countries and territories. With full translations in 85 languages, and at least 5 million copies distributed, the World Health Organization regards “Where There Is No Doctor” as the world’s most widely used health manual. And yet, the book’s reach is likely even wider thanks to Hesperian’s open-copyright policy, which has allowed information and illustrations from the book to be photocopied, adapted, and distributed as booklets, pamphlets, posters and the like. Sarah Shannon, Hesperian’s Executive Director since 1996, shares that the organization continues to receive countless letters, emails, and stories about how the book has positively impacted the lives of individuals and their communities around the world.

In addition to “Where There Is No Doctor”, Hesperian has produced other easy-to-read, life-saving manuals and resources related to health and health care. Today, Hesperian’s library includes over a dozen books, covering topics like disability, reproductive health, environmental health, worker safety, and more. Nearly all these titles have also been translated into other languages, and all are available for adaptation to local conditions and further translation.

“Where There Is No Doctor” continues to be updated to address changing health care concerns. The most recent revision of the health manual was completed in 2022 and is available as a bound volume (in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Kreyol, Urdu, and Bambara) or as a PDF, and its chapters can be read and downloaded for free on Hesperian’s website.

Laura Goldman lived in Ecuador in the 1970s, much of the time working in a village well known for its midwives and bone setters. “Where There Is No Doctor” was “incredibly helpful,” she remembers, in guiding her to distinguish between the wisdom of traditional ways and the modern medical understanding of health issues. Among the many valuable lessons she learned was how to recognize, treat, and teach about dehydration in young children with a nearly no-cost, easy-to-make rehydration solution of water, sugar, and salt.

When Goldman began training other Peace Corps Volunteers, she told them, “Whatever you are going to be doing, this is a good book to have on hand.” She added that “the beauty and usefulness of Hesperian materials is based in respect for local knowledge, wisdom, resources, and traditions, while being grounded in modern, medically appropriate interventions,” Goldman says.



Laura Goldman serves food to children in Ecuador, circa 1974

In 2005, when **Daniel Williams** arrived in an out-of-the-way Amerindian village in the interior of Guyana to spend two years assisting a community health worker, he found an old copy of the book on the shelf in the community health worker’s office.

“I used it on a daily basis,” he remembers. His job entailed helping the community health worker in whatever way she needed. “Someone would come in with a symptom... and then we would use “Where There Is No Doctor” to ...translate their signs and symptoms to make a differential diagnosis.” Usually, it provided a treatment methodology, often with medicines that were common enough to already be on the shelves of the clinic. One example: Scabies was rampant. A smear of petroleum-based jelly on scabies lesions would suffocate the tiny scabies mites, allowing the scabies patient’s skin to heal. Williams also used “Where There Is No Doctor” to diagnose and treat his own health problems. “I hurt myself a lot, drank a lot of terrible things, and got sick a lot,” he recalls. He vividly remembers using advice from “Where There Is No Doctor” to get over a bout of giardia.



Daniel Williams converses with children during a World AIDS Day community picnic.

BOOK LOCKER



“Out-houses should be built at least 20 meters from homes or the source of water. It helps to throw a little lime, dirt, or ashes in the hold after each use to reduce the smell and keep flies away.”

rian’s online HealthWiki. In 2011, Hesperian began working on “The NEW Where There Is No Doctor”, a project that expands on the previous edition and covers new topics, such as diabetes and heart disease, that were not included in the original.

This year, both Hesperian and “Where There Is No Doctor”, the book, are celebrating their 50th birthday. Although the magnitude of the book’s impact may never be fully quantified, my conversations with a few RPCVs suggest some of the many ways that the health information in “Where There Is No Doctor” has supported the health of PCVs and their host communities across place and time. The experiences of these RPCVs hint at what can be learned from this newly updated, but classic, resource. ●

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of “Where There Is No Doctor” with Hesperian! Share your story and get involved at: <https://bit.ly/rpcv50th>

Melinda Glines, who worked as a health education trainer in the Fiji Islands from 1994–1996, received a copy of “Where There Is No Doctor” among her standard Peace Corps supplies. Already interested in public health work, Glines recalls immediately reading the book “cover to cover.” She then used the book to help her train nurses and other professionals to be better health educators. She also used it to diagnose and treat the health conditions encountered by volunteers.

“Medical information tends to be confusing,” says Glines, now a family medicine physician. But this book “breaks things down into very basic terms and uses cartoon-like illustrations to present important information in a way that is more likely to be understood by folks who have really basic literacy levels.” Also, the book gave her tools to contrast with local medical myths, such as the widespread fear that vasectomy was a form of castration.

Even today, Glines says that aspects of her current practice—such as her promotion of vaccinations in situations when other doctors might not make the effort—is rooted in her Peace Corps years when she used “Where There Is No Doctor” as a resource and guide.



Melinda Glines (Fiji 1994-96) visits with a new mother and her baby

Laura Kettel Khan was given a copy of “Where There Is No Doctor” when she went to Honduras in 1981. “I relied on it heavily,” she remembers, for everything “from basic first aid, to how to clean out wounds, to rehydration techniques.”

In the village, home to about 300 people, where Khan lived for her first year, she used lessons from the book to improve the local piped water supply. When villagers approached her with questions about what to do about wounds, diarrhea, dehydration, and other common health problems, “I would tell them, referring to the book.”

Khan spent the second half of her service in a larger town, where she showed the book to local doctors who appreciated its simple and clear writing. “One doctor told me that the book put [information] in a context and wording that was easy to explain to his patients.”

Occasionally medical professionals from the United States would arrive on medical missions, and Khan would help by translating their English into Spanish—while also translating the concepts the Americans brought from the United States into a local context. Once, after the workday ended and she was sharing dinner with the visiting Americans, “They asked me how I could do it...and I told them about “Where There Is No Doctor.”

Occasionally, too, Khan would have her own health problems—such as when she was bitten by a brown recluse spider. “Where There Is No Doctor”, she recalls, “more than once saved my life.”