

## Tearfund: Mandatory post-assignment medical and Opt-out policy for psychological debriefing

Tearfund is a Christian international aid and development agency working globally to end poverty and injustice, and to restore dignity and hope in some of the world's poorest communities. They operate in roughly fifty countries around the world. As well as being present in disaster situations and recovery through their response teams, they speak out on behalf of poor people on the national and international stage by petitioning governments, campaigning for justice and raising the profile of key poverty issues.

Tearfund requires all returning field-based staff to attend a returner's medical check-up at a pre-approved travel health clinic and has an opt-out policy for a post-assignment psychological debriefing with one of three psychologists or three professional counsellors: all of whom have received additional training by Tearfund to provide an appropriate debriefing experience.

Tearfund's psychological debriefing began as critical incident stress group debriefing but soon developed into individual debriefing for all emergency personnel. A Tearfund manager says, *"It became a normal end-of-assignment protocol for our relief teams, developing it as an opt-out model rather than an opt-in one, so that it became accepted as a normal post-assignment appointment rather than pinpointing anyone as 'needing a debrief'."*

Because staff must sign a disclaimer should they choose not to receive the debriefing, the opt-out policy encourages staff to receive a psychological check-up. The procedure also provides legal protection if psychological issues present after staff have left the organisation.

Tearfund subsequently decided to offer the post-assignment psychological debriefing to non-relief international staff and frequent travellers based in London, due to the inherent challenges and accumulative stress that all workers encounter. *"We felt that staff would benefit from this type of individual and confidential support whether or not they felt, or others perceived them as being 'high risk'. Staff share valuable insight on the positive and challenging aspects of their assignment. This insight needs to be woven back into the fabric of the organisation so that it can adapt and grow."*

Tearfund has found that almost all eligible staff (approximately 90%) voluntarily attend a post assignment psychological debriefing. They have created a culture that acknowledges the inherent stress of aid work. Currently, a small number of international staff are debriefed in Nairobi and Tearfund is in the process of identifying and working with psychologists and doctors in Nairobi who can offer services in line with those provided in London. Finding high quality medical and psychological services for staff that do not return through regional or headquarter offices was identified as a challenge for several organisations.