

Students, Parents, and Health: Reporting Medical Needs and Supporting Students Pre-Departure and Onsite

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Tags

Crisis-Management; Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Management and Operations; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

A U.S.-based provider organization facilitates summer, semester, and year-long education abroad programs for undergraduate students in numerous locations including Seoul, South Korea. As part of the onsite support, the provider employs a full-time site director, Lee, who is regularly available to the students and assists them with their cultural transition, course registration, and housing. The director also leads orientation, organizes field trips and activities, and oversees the students' study experience and well-being throughout the academic session. Lee works alone in a small office on the host university campus. Most of the students who participate in this program are third-year or fourth-year undergraduates enrolled in a U.S. institution. Student groups can number as high as 50 students per session. Among the organization's U.S.-based staff is a health and safety team who collects health information from students prior to their study and guides them on particular needs such as medication, health-related accommodations, insurance, and other relevant topics.

Case

Ray is a 20-year-old politics and Korean language double major studying at a large, mid-western U.S. institution. His dream is to successfully study abroad in Seoul before graduating. He has two semesters

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remaining after the current one. He was awarded a partial academic scholarship by his institution and is also using financial aid and family savings to attend the program.

One month into the session, Ray's mother calls the local site director on a weeknight at 1 a.m. local time, saying that her son is having trouble breathing. She explains that she can track his health status, including breathing rate, with an app on her cellphone. The student is located in a single room in on-campus housing and has been fully participating onsite for the first month of the semester session. The student has neither reported (predeparture or onsite) nor shown any medical needs or breathing trouble during his time onsite. The parent, who is calling from the U.S., reports to the director that her son needs special breathing equipment in order to sleep each night which she also monitors with the phone app. The student reportedly has the equipment with him, but the parent is not sure it is functioning properly. Neither the health team nor the site director were informed by the student, parent, or home institution of the student's need for medical equipment or support before or after the student's arrival. The parent asks the site director to go check on the student in person. Moreover, the parent asks the organization's health team and onsite staff to monitor the student's health for the remainder of the semester by using the same app.

The site director Lee feels this is an unreasonable request for her personally and a liability for the organization. She calls the residence hall and speaks to the student who reports he is fine and will meet with her the next day to discuss his medical equipment needs. However, Lee refuses to use the app (considering it an invasion of privacy) and requests that the student be withdrawn from the program if his needs cannot be adequately met by the student himself. The parent wants the student to remain onsite and to complete his semester abroad. The student's U.S. institution has yet to communicate with the student, parent, or organization on the matter.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the challenges of collecting health information pre-departure?
- How might organizations and institutions best work with parents, families, and students regarding health issues and reporting, before departure and onsite?
- Does the organization or institution have any ability to require information?
- What does this case reflect about parent involvement in undergraduates' study abroad experiences?
- What does this case indicate regarding the use of technology?
- What do you consider the health and safety team's role and decision-making power in a similar case?
- What do you consider the site director's role and decision-making power in this case?
- Should the student's home university or the Korean host university be consulted about this case?
- Does culture or location play a role at all in this case or similar cases?