Title: Progress Towards Ethical Practices in Medical Student Participation in Global Surgery Projects: A Qualitative Analysis

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**Background**

In recent years, there has been growing interest in global surgery among medical students. Preparation for these projects is critical to ensure that these projects are conducted in ethical and sustainable manners that maximize benefits and minimize harms to host international partners. Given that the literature focuses on graduate medical trainees, there is a need to explore the role of preparation in medical student experiences.

The study aims were: 1) to evaluate the role of formal pre-departure preparation/training for global surgery projects and experiences; and 2) to explore how formal preparation can aid medical students in enjoying an enriching experience while contributing positively to the destination communities during international projects.

**Methods**

This qualitative study used phone interviews of volunteer key informants (n=9), from US medical schools, who participated in international global surgery projects during medical school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using an inductive approach to thematic content analysis.

**Results**

Analysis of 9 key informant interviews demonstrated methods of preparation included skills building; discussion of ethical dilemmas; environment and expectation management; cultural orientation; logistics planning; defining goals, expectations, and role clarity; and acknowledgement of needing to learn through experience. During their experiences, three themes emerged: (1) conflicting values and practices in the clinical space; (2) ethical challenges in research; (3) navigating situations involving cultural dynamics.

**Conclusions**

Overall, while participants faced ethical dilemmas during their projects, they felt well prepared to navigate such challenges and demonstrated a high level of self-reflection and understanding of the ethics of global surgery. Such findings offer a hopeful perspective regarding the progress that has been made towards engaging in more ethical practices, particularly for trainees, as we work to address global disparities in surgery.