

**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.<sup>1</sup> Preparation for these projects is critical<sup>2,3</sup> to ensure that these projects are conducted in ethical and sustainable manners that maximize benefits and minimize harms to host international partners.<sup>4,5</sup> Given that the literature focuses on graduate medical trainees, there is a need to explore the role of preparation in medical student experiences.<sup>6</sup>

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.