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

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Background

- Medical student interest in global surgery has grown rapidly in the past decade.1
- Preparation for projects is critical. 2,3
- Ensures they contribute to long-term partnerships with, and sustainable development of, partner communities.4,5
- Short-term global surgery projects pose unique risks to students and international hosts.6
- Literature focuses on graduate medical trainees’ preparation, not medical students.7
- There is a need to explore the role of preparation in supporting positive global surgery experiences for medical students.

Methods

- Population: students who participated in an international project during medical school related to surgery/procedural specialty.
- Semi-structured phone interviews of 9 key informants.
- Inductive approach to thematic content analysis addressing:
  1. Prior experiences and education.
  2. Training during medical school related to ethics, community engagement, and cultural competency.
  3. Experience in global surgery and contributing factors to their preparedness.
  4. Mastery of and perception of the importance of ethics training, community engagement skills, and cultural competency.
- Projects took place in Kenya (n=1), Rwanda (n=1), Ghana (n=3), South Africa (n=2), Malawi (n=1), and Colombia (n=1).

Characteristics of Key Informants (n = 9)

- Age: 22-34 years
- Gender: 4 Female, 5 Male
- Race: 2 Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 African/African American, 3 White, 1 Latinx
- Languages Spoken: English, Mandarin, Spanish, French, Arabic, French
- Prior International Experience (Y/N): Yes
- Prior Research Experience (Y/N): Yes

Results

Participant Methods of Preparation (n = 9)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Conflicting Values and Practices in the Clinical Space</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I think we are well prepared for just like being able to make that [trousers]... and just having to say like, I’ve never done this. Can you do it with me.”</td>
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<td>“I was super self-conscious of like not taking opportunities away from Ghanaian med students.”</td>
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<td>“There’s just not a lot of procedures done on stools, not enough equipment, patients stayed in the waiting room for a long time... just compared to how we did it here... they treat the patient as well as they could, I think for the circumstances.”</td>
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Navigating Challenges During Projects (n = 9)

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<tr>
<th>Theme 2: Ethical Challenges in Research</th>
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<td>“It would have been so easy to bring some resources to treat some of those skin conditions so easily. On the duffel bag medicine [trous] where you get immediate results... And so it wasn’t really an ethical dilemma because a lot of us knew exactly what we were doing, and so we knew we wouldn’t see immediate results. But a lot of people complained about not seeing the immediate results.”</td>
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<th>Theme 3: Navigating Situations Involving Cultural Dynamics</th>
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<td>“I asked like nurses and medical students and patients like their thoughts on different questions and wording. And I think that made a tremendous difference in, you know, mitigating some of the other challenges that I think would have been there.”</td>
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Discussion

- Demonstrated strong understanding of cultural humility, global health ethics, and self-reflection.
- Challenges faced often related to differences in cultural values/practices and desire to avoid imposing own values on hosts.
- Preparation was critical to preventing and navigating ethical dilemmas that arose.
  - Setting goals, expectations, and role clarity with mentors and international host partners ensured host agency and maximized benefits to host community.
  - Individual characteristics (humility, flexibility, knowledge of global health ethics, self-awareness) important in navigating situations that they were not prepared for.
- Limitations:
  - Uses key informants, thus results are not generalizable.
  - No interviewees identified as Black or American Indian and Alaska Native, thus missing the perspectives of these important underrepresented minority groups.

Conclusions

- Findings offer a hopeful perspective regarding progress made toward engaging in more ethical practices, particularly for trainees.
- Findings should serve as a model for how programs should approach preparation to global surgery projects.
- Future studies should assess the perspectives of host communities on efficacy of preparation methods.

References

4. Peluso MJ, Kallian E, Elenay M, Robin

For all figures above, size of text and/or depth of color represent the frequency that a theme arose.