The Evaluation of Medical Student International Mission Trips: A Rapid Review

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**Background and Significance**

- International medical mission trips (MMTs) are an increasingly important and prevalent aspect of medical school global health curriculums.
- These experiences vary significantly in their characteristics, oversight, and educational goals.
- There are few standards defining how these trips should be conducted to maximize educational outcomes for students, health outcomes for patients and communities, and to prevent exploitation of vulnerable populations.
- Reviews of the literature on civilian, military, and surgical missions have found an alarming lack of evidence-based clinical guidelines or uniformity in evaluation.
- Little is known about the nature and quality of evaluation in medical mission trips conducted by medical students.

**Research Questions**

- Do medical student mission trips adequately evaluate their success in achieving educational and global health objectives?
- Do student MMTs assess outcomes for students, patients, and communities served?
- Where evaluation happens, what data is collected and how are outcomes measured?

**Methods**

- Conducted a rapid systematic review of the medical mission trip literature using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines.
- Included articles collecting quantitative or qualitative data on discreet medical student mission trips.

**Results**

**Study Characteristics**

- 9 - exclusively medical students, 6 - mix of health students and professionals (including medical students), 4 - host site coordinators and clinicians.

**Methodologies**

- 8 - pre- and post-MMT surveys
- 3 - post-MMT surveys
- 7 - semi-structured interviews
- 1 - post-intervention knowledge testing

**Outcomes Assessed**

- 7 - student attitudes about MMTs, global health care delivery, motivations for participating
- 3 - students experiences with ethical challenges
- 3 - changes in student educational competencies (e.g. cultural)
- 3 - host attitudes about MMTs
- 1 - technical knowledge post-intervention
- 1 - costs of trips for participants
- 1 - student perceptions of inter-professional collaboration

**Discussion**

- Just under half of 90 relevant records attempted to evaluate discrete MMTs - remainder theoretical.
- Most articles involved qualitative evaluation of participant opinions and attitudes - few assessed competencies.
- Attitudes and beliefs of trip participants are overwhelmingly and disproportionately represented.
- Very little quantitative data collection in this cohort, and none about patient outcome measures.

**Conclusions**

- The literature on medical mission trips for medical students is severely lacking in rigorous data collection concerning student educational outcomes and patient outcomes.
- Very little data is collected on the impact of these experiences on the communities they serve in LMICs leaving open the risk of exploitation and unethical intervention.
- More methodical research approaches are needed and must focus not only on participants of MMTs.

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