

Medical Volunteerism

A curriculum on: Ethical Constructs, Sustainability, and Personal Implications

Layne Anderson

Abstract

Many articles have been published regarding the topic of medical volunteerism or “voluntourism” and the potential implications, positive or negative. As a medical student who has been involved in medical volunteerism, there is little formally or widely taught to medical students or even undergraduate students about their role in medical mission work. Additionally, there are no clear legal guidelines that cross international borders. This has left many to rely on the precedent set before them or their own judgement. There has been growing involvement in medical volunteerism, consisting of “up to 10 million volunteers [who] travel abroad annually, spending approximately \$4 billion” (Sullivan 2017). With the growing involvement and lack of widespread formal training, there has been a concurrent increase in concerns regarding the outcomes from international medical volunteer work. The purpose of this project is to critically review the literature that has been published regarding medical volunteerism and use the themes repeated most to compose a formal curriculum geared for undergraduate and medical students considering involvement in medical volunteerism. The University of Colorado Anschutz – Strauss Health Sciences Library journal collection was searched using terms such as “medical volunteerism” and “international volunteering.” The most common themes within the literature reviewed included ethics, sustainability, and personal implications. The development of these important themes in this review can be used to provide supplementary information when utilizing the accompanying lesson plan and PowerPoint. Ultimately, students interested in partaking in medical volunteerism will preemptively consider their personal motivations, become fully aware of the bounds of their role clinically, become educated on the community being served, plan for potential challenges, gain tools for reflection, and promote future research on outcomes. Ideally, through the development, dissemination, and enforcement of a curriculum conveying clear guidelines for ethical and sustainable medical volunteerism, we as a medical community can improve the care we provide both at home and abroad.