Bioethics and Moral Hazard in Short-Term International Medical Training

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Ethical Challenges of International Health Work

- Self-serving
  - providing value for visitors but without meeting the local community’s needs

- Raising unmet expectations
  - sending volunteer practitioners and trainees who do not have appropriate language or medical training or accountability

- Ineffective
  - providing temporary, short-term therapies that fail to address root causes

- Imposing burdens on local health facilities
  - providing culturally irrelevant or disparaging care and leave behind medical waste

- Inappropriate
  - failing to follow current standards of health care delivery (continuity, access) or public health programs (equity, sustainability)

Principles of Biomedical Ethics

* a Western philosophical construct

1. Respect for autonomous persons
2. Justice
3. Nonmaleficence
4. Beneficence
Challenges to Ethical Care

Culture and Language

- Communication breakdowns and cultural differences are ubiquitous
  - Less likely to receive care
  - Less likely to be compliant
  - Greater risk of experiencing medical errors

- Respect for autonomous individuals requires providers to acknowledge and honor a patient’s ability to consent for treatment.

Challenges to Ethical Care

Lack of Adequate Time, Resources

- Triage – identifying medical needs and likelihood of benefit.

- The principle of justice obligates medical personnel to consider the medical utility and prospect of success as factors in the decisions about how to allocate resources.

- The Utilitarian Approach
  - To do the most good for the most people
  - To offer the best possible care (for the community? for the individual?) with available medications and equipment
Challenges to Ethical Care

Chronic Care and Elective Surgery

- **Nonmaleficence** requires physicians to consider what care should *not* be offered.

- Without the ability to provide long-term follow-up care, avoid chronic care medication and elective surgery. (Jesus 2010: 19)
Challenges to Ethical Care

Sustainability

* A rational and **beneficent approach** to serving communities in the developing world should involve teaching and training community members and local health care workers.
Challenges to Ethical Care

Delivery of Care by Nonlicensed Personnel and the Need for Oversight

- The principle of respect for autonomous persons requires the protection of populations with diminished autonomy.
- All personnel and administrators must have the humility to recognize their limitations, and tailor their actions accordingly.
Global Health Ethics for Students

1. Humility
2. Introspection
3. Solidarity
4. Social Justice

Medical Tourism can undermine existing health care and cause harm to local systems and (power) structures.

Be aware of one’s own privilege

Work to align your goals with those of the community.

Ultimately, global health should be concerned with health inequity seen in the world.

Additional Resources


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AND OF INTEREST:


Questions for Students
Prior to Global Health Work
(Handout)

Why do you hope to do this work?

What are your objectives, both personal and structural, short and long-term?

What are the benefits and who will receive them, and what are the costs, and who will bear them?

In the context of very limited institutional and societal resources for global health needs, is your elective justified? What alternatives exist, or how can the justification for this allocation of resources be improved?

What do you need to do to prepare for your elective, both practical and personal?

Where are the weaknesses in your plan, specifically?

Is the work feasible, cost-effective, necessary, focused, and justified?

Will it work to undermine disparity in the host community, or will it contribute to disparity? Will there be a net benefit to the community?

What do you hope to bring back to your own community or institution?

Is your work sustainable locally? If not, will this program or your group’s presence leave any negative impacts or potential unjustified disruption?