What is Our Responsibility?
Global Health Ethics in Practice

Kelly Anderson, National Officer of Public Health
Fadi Hamadani, National Officer of Partnership
Canadian Federation of Medical Students
Step 1: We engage in global health.

- **30% of medical students** complete an international elective or exchange. (Journal of Ethics, AMA)

- **Evidence:** international electives result public health and cultural competency.

- **Viscerally:** “The quest to improve global health... it is difficult to imagine a pursuit more closely aligned with the professional values and visceral instincts of most physicians.”

---


Step 2:
Training in global health ethics is paramount but currently inadequate.

• Can medical students and physicians do harm pursuing global health activities. Yes.

• Has the need for ethics training been articulated? Yes, by expert opinion.

“Do Doctors Who Volunteer Their Services In Disasters Overseas Do More Harm Than Good? BMJ 2006;332:244 (28 January)”


Pinto, A. and R. Upshur. “Global Health Ethics for Students”. *Developing World Bioethics* 2007. ISSN 1471-8731 (print); 1471-8847 (online).


RWANDA AND IAVI

Short-term HIV care
Step 3: First do no harm

An assessment of ethical frameworks in global health to date
Outline

learning from ethical standards in other disciplines: lessons and limitations

establishing the need for evidence-based frameworks

overview of ethical frameworks in global health
Ideology & Methodology
In the context of global health
Current Global Health Experiences

- Grassroots Experience
- Law
- Money

Academic Discourse (journals, conferences, workshops, etc.)

- Cultural Values/Morals
- Popular Culture
- NGOs
- Case Statutes
- Critical Thinking
- Community Partnership
- Measured Results

Scenario, Project, Predicament

Ethics

Communication
1) Fundamental principles lacking

can we just apply the fundamental ethical principles of “Western” medicine to global health?

are these principles indeed universal, and if they are, do they take the same form in different cultural contexts?

even if we apply these principles to global health, shouldn’t we apply the above model of discourse (the model) to them in the context of global health?
2) Assessment of current frameworks

Pinto (2007)

GHEC/AMSA (2006)

AMA Journal of Ethics (Virtual Mentor)

McCarthy & Petrosoniak (2008)
Summary of Step 3

a model for developing ethical standards exists in all other fields, including medicine

a model is needed in global health work that utilizes other models and is sensitive to the unique challenges of global health

current attempts to develop ethical criteria are a good start, but need to evolve through a multidisciplinary process (incorporating elements of law, cultural differences, community partner’s concerns, socio-economic conditions, ethical discourse)
Step 4: Taking responsibility

What **must happen** at Canadian medical schools?
Difficult Questions.

We are medical experts, not global health experts.

1. In overseas medical electives, how do we ensure that we are not a drain on the system? Are we impeding the training of local medical students and health professionals?
2. Should we use our power as physicians to advocate for global health from within Canada? And if not, why are we not interested in this approach?

3. Are you involved locally in refugee and community development issues? If not here, then why internationally?
4. If we are driven to ‘help’ a particular community, do we need to actually be a part of that community? And is that possible?

5. Should we consider engaging in international relief over development if we are only available short-term?
6. Should we measure the outcome of our student’s overseas activities? How do we ensure that in the long-term we don’t cause harm to the communities we work in?

7. Are short-term clinical exchanges the best way to learn about the global health challenges facing us all?
Preventing Harm: it starts with us.

• In a recent survey (pending publication) completed by 76 Canadian physicians who engage in global health, no respondents indicated that their projects created any potentially negative impacts in the short or long-term.
Let's start asking difficult questions and taking responsibility.