



## SPECIAL ARTICLE

# A pioneering on medical education: The seminal text of J.P. Frank's *De medicis peregrinationibus* – Medical travels (1792)



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Seminal medical texts;  
Mobility programs

### Abstract

**Background:** Medical travel is a general term for all journeys made by a health professional, and are common practice for education and training as a significant globalised topic in modern medical education, and their relevance dates back far into history.

**Methods:** A historical-documental method is used in this study. It re-examines and discusses critically the J.P. Frank text *De medicis peregrinationibus* (medical travel) written in 1792.

**Findings:** This paper enlightens on the meaning and usefulness of medical travels towards the end of the 18th century. A critical review of the text is carried out in order to compare medical travel and medical education towards the end of the 18th century with the same travel and education today.

The authors discuss a number of relevant points that Frank makes regarding travelling physicians, the meaning and usefulness of medical travels, as well as about a proposed curriculum for travelling physicians that could still be followed today.

**Conclusions:** As a general conclusion, Frank's paper could be considered a seminal work on medical travel for educational purposes. His observations are still relevant today, reflected in students travelling abroad as part of mobility programmes in medical education.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE**

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Programas  
de movilidad

## Un pionero de la educación médica: el texto fundamental *De medicis peregrinationibus* (Viajes médicos), de J.P. Frank (1792)

**Resumen**

**Antecedentes:** Los viajes médicos, como término general para todo viaje realizado por un profesional de la salud, son una práctica habitual para su educación y capacitación, que conforma además un significativo tópico globalizado de la educación médica moderna, aunque su relevancia se remonte en la historia.

**Método:** Esta investigación utiliza un método histórico-documental. Revisa y analiza críticamente el texto *De medicis peregrinationibus* (Viajes médicos) escrito por J.P. Frank en 1792.

**Hallazgos:** Este artículo explica el significado y la utilidad para el aprendizaje de los viajes médicos hacia finales del siglo XVIII. Se lleva a cabo una revisión crítica del texto, tratando de comparar viajes médicos e instrucción médica hacia finales del siglo XVIII con los mismos viajes y educación hoy en día.

Se discuten una serie de puntos relevantes que Frank realiza con respecto a los viajes médicos, su significado y la utilidad de estos, comentando una propuesta curricular para los médicos viajeros que bien podrían seguirse aún hoy.

**Conclusiones:** Como conclusión general, el texto de Frank podría considerarse una obra fundamental sobre los viajes médicos con fines educativos. Sus observaciones son aún relevantes hoy en día, tal como se refleja en los estudios sobre estudiantes que viajan al extranjero en la actualidad como parte de programas de movilidad en su formación médica.

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**Background**

Medical travel is a significant globalised topic in modern medical education,<sup>1-3</sup> but its relevance dates back far into history. So medical students who travel abroad today as part of the international mobility programs<sup>4</sup> (i.e. Erasmus program), actually have quite distant forerunners. Ekeid<sup>5</sup> talks about the mediaeval *studiosi vagantes* [student travellers] who wandered Europe seeking a better education. Grell and Arrizabalaga's<sup>6</sup> work provides an overview of centres of medical excellence between 1500 and 1789, and a list of authors of books describing the adventure-like journeys of travelling physicians. Furthermore, the narratives of medical travellers from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries are available in the collection by Spillane.<sup>7</sup>

The Latin term *peregrinatio medica* (medical travel) was coined to describe the journeys that medical students made to various centres of excellence seeking the best possible education, one which would have a positive impact on their teaching and medical practice upon their return. Prestigious hospitals and universities attracted large numbers of foreign students and qualified.

Medical travels were a usual practice for medical education along the 19th century. In this way, the great reformer of American medical teaching,<sup>8</sup> Abraham Flexner enjoyed unequalled access to institutions and introductions to professors, researchers, and foreign ministers travelling abroad at the beginning of the 20th century.

In this paper, the term "medical travel" will be used in its original meaning, as opposed to that of other similar terms used today, such as "medical tourism" (seeking better medical treatment abroad), "travel Medicine" (treatment of health problems in travellers), "medical emigration" (medical professionals travelling abroad

seeking a better quality of life and working conditions) or "expeditionary Medicine" (doctors in armies or on ships). We understand medical travel to refer to medical students, residents and qualified doctors improving their education in other countries, as well as outstanding doctors teaching and providing practical demonstrations abroad; this geographic mobility would be associated with career advancement.<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this paper is to provide a methodical overview of the many well-founded observations that Frank made two centuries ago in his seminal work on medical education, in order to identify implications for modern travels undertaken for educational purposes.

**Glossing****The text and the context**

Although medical travel was already quite common and travellers put their experiences down in writing upon their return, the first research into the topic in the medical sciences field only came when Johann Peter Frank<sup>10</sup> provided a systematic overview of the subject in his chapter *De medicis peregrinationibus* in volume 11 of his magnum opus *Delectus opusculorum medicorum* [selected medical works], a true *monumenta medica*. Frank's work is not mentioned in Grell and Arrizabalaga's collection,<sup>6</sup> and we have been unable to find any references to the chapter in the literature, despite the fact that it could be considered a pioneering document on medical travel in the historiography of medical education worldwide. Bonner<sup>11</sup> mentions Frank merely as an expert in medical policy and great reformer of medical education who tried to tighten the connection between clinical practice and academic practice.

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