

International Emergency Medicine



MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY: BUILDING AN ACADEMIC CAREER IN GLOBAL EMERGENCY MEDICINE

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Abstract—Background: As the specialty of emergency medicine (EM) continues to spread around the world, a growing number of academic emergency physicians have become involved in global EM development, research, and teaching. While academic departments have always found this work laudable, they have only recently begun to accept global EM as a rigorous academic pursuit in its own right. **Objective:** This article describes how emergency physicians can translate their global health work into “academic currency” within both the clinician-educator and clinician-researcher tracks. **Discussion:** The authors discuss the impact of various types of additional training, including global EM fellowships, for launching a career in global EM. Clearly delineated clinician-researcher and clinician-educator tracks are important for documenting achievement in global EM. **Conclusions:** Reflecting a growing interest in global health, more of today’s EM faculty members are ascending the academic ranks as global EM specialists. Whether attempting to climb the academic ladder as a clinician-educator or clinician-researcher, advanced planning and the firm support of one’s academic chair is crucial to the success of the promotion process. Given the relative youth of the subspecialty of global EM, however, it will take time for the pathways to academic promotion to become well delineated. © 2014 Elsevier Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Global emergency medicine (EM) is a rapidly growing academic subspecialty in EM that focuses on improving emergency care worldwide through clinical care, research, and educational programs. In the last 2 decades, more than 40 fellowship programs with a global EM focus have opened and now, many EM faculty, trainees, and medical students pursue international opportunities each year (1).

This growth has encouraged ever more junior faculty to focus on global EM, although the pathway for a successful academic career in this subspecialty remains unclear. This article outlines two pathways—the clinician-educator and clinician-researcher tracks—to academic promotion in global EM. The article concludes with a discussion of training opportunities in global EM, including global EM fellowships.

DISCUSSION

American medical schools today face a changing landscape. They are increasingly reliant on clinical revenue, rather than research funding, as in the past, to “make

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ends meet.” Securing grants has become more difficult in today’s extramural funding environment (2). Medical education reform demands that schools evolve to meet the needs of their students. In the face of these challenges, many United States (US) and Canadian medical schools have created academic “tracks” (e.g., clinical, education, research, and administration) along which faculty can advance both themselves and the various missions of the medical school.

Promotion Criteria for Clinician-Educators

According to a 2003 study, “teaching skills” and “overall clinical skills” are the most important factors in determining academic promotion for clinician-educators (3). Preparation for promotion should occur early—ideally at hiring—and with help from one’s academic chair.

There are many objective criteria by which clinician-educator performances are judged. Department Chairs and Promotion and Tenure Committee Chairs view teaching awards and formal evaluations by peers and trainees as important measures. The teaching portfolio, discussed later in this article, is an important objective measure of clinician-educator teaching activities (3). Peer-reviewed publications are always important criteria for academic promotion, but the number of publications needed for advancement varies. Clinician-educators are generally expected to have half as many publications (typically five to seven) as clinician-researchers for promotion from assistant professor to associate professor (4).

Documentation of Clinician-Educator Achievement

Clinician-educators in global EM must be able to document that their international work benefits their teaching and clinical performance. They must demonstrate that their work leads to improved health outcomes via curriculum development, training, and innovations that change practices. Teaching portfolios catalog the educational activities and accomplishments of the clinician-educator going up for promotion. Common elements of the teaching portfolio include academic appointments, education and training, publications, grants, lectures and educational sessions, committee service, documentation of teaching excellence, and a narrative of teaching philosophy and career aspirations (5).

Another way to document achievement is the impact map (6). The impact map graphically displays a clinician-educator’s record of innovation—from original idea to changes in practice. A final approach is to categorize productivity according to the roles (teacher, mentor and supervisor, educational administrator, scholar of teaching) and responsibilities of the clinician-educator (7). In each of these formats, the clinician-educator has

documented important outcomes of curriculum development, training of learners and educators, and practice-changing innovations.

Demonstrating Academic Productivity as a Clinician-Educator

Clinician-educators are often involved in educational endeavors, such as international clinical rotations, education modules, and global EM fellowships.

Direction of international clinical rotations can demonstrate the ability to develop curricula and provide formal feedback to learners. Faculty directing these elective rotations must: outline predetermined and measurable learning objectives; employ means for learners to achieve the specific objectives; and develop effective assessment and evaluation tools. Completion of such elements affords faculty members the opportunity to establish a track record of training program coordination and field mentorship.

Faculty at institutions with developed academic tracks in global EM can document an increase in students, residents, and fellows who obtain further training in global health and make it part of their career.

A global EM education module, if integrated into the medical school or residency curriculum, also demonstrates academic productivity and expertise. The education module can be a compilation of related global health and emergency care didactics supported by documented acquisition of learning and formal feedback from learners and peers.

Directing a global EM fellowship program, often the most important educational endeavor for the clinician-educator in global EM, can demonstrate significant academic productivity, including the following:

- Documented curriculum development;
- Documented progress in learner knowledgebase and skills set;
- Documented formal feedback from learners and peers;
- Establishment of a track record of training program coordination;
- Establishment of one as an educator/leader/mentor in the field of global EM;
- Establishment of a track record of grant support; and
- Establishment of a track record of written scholarship.

Involvement in educational endeavors outside the home institution by leading global EM organizations, giving invited lectures, and consulting at other institutions are all important for promotion at junior levels.

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