

EDUCATION

To the point: obstetrics and gynecology global health experiences for medical students

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Enthusiasm for global health experiences among physicians-in-training over the past 30 years has been well documented and discussed in medical education literature.^{1,2} In 2012, 30.4% of graduates of US medical schools reported having participated in a global health structured elective or volunteer experience.³ Benefits for the student participating in global health curriculum and experiences include increased cultural competency, a developed sense of social responsibility and idealism, enhanced enthusiasm for learning, increased self-awareness, enhanced clinical skills, and increased knowledge.^{1,4,5} Such benefits to the student can result in a workforce locally that is interested and invested in primary care, and dedicated to the underserved.⁵⁻⁷

Despite the increased interest in global health experiences, in 2011 only 24% (32/133) of all US medical schools had evidence of a structured global health program that students could complete without extending their medical degree training time.⁸ In addition, only 40% of those schools included a global health clinical experience. This phenomenon is not unique to the United States.⁴ Izadnegahdar et al⁹ in 2008 surveyed Canadian medical schools and found that they vary widely in their approach to global

This article, from the To the Point series prepared by the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics Undergraduate Medical Education Committee, provides educators with an overview of considerations for obstetrics and gynecology global health experiences for the medical student. Options for integration of obstetrics and gynecology global health into undergraduate medical curricula are discussed. Specific considerations for global health clinical experiences for medical students, including choosing a clinical location, oversight and mentorship, goals and objectives, predeparture preparation, and evaluation, are reviewed.

Key words: curriculum, global health, international, medical students, obstetrics and gynecology

health education, with little consensus regarding content or structure of the teaching or clinical experiences. There is currently not a global health standard for the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), and medical school global health experiences and curricula can vary largely. For example, schools may offer global health certificates, tracks, or concentrations that may or may not include clinical or outreach experiences and could span 1-4 years, or students may participate in isolated 1-week outreach experiences that may or may not include clinical components.^{6,7,10-13} Furthermore, global health may be an elective choice, or can be fully integrated as a core competency for student learning. Internet search using terms “global health,” “international health,” “obstetrics and gynecology,” “medical school,” and “medical student” as well as personal communication with Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics Undergraduate Medical Education Committee member institutions revealed examples of current obstetrics and gynecology global health experiences being offered (Table 1). PubMed search using the same terms revealed examples of global health

experiences cited throughout this article. Drain et al⁵ propose specific steps that medical schools could take to meet the global health demand, including integrating topics into core teaching, creating global health pathways and tracks, supporting an administrative position or office to aid students, forming international partnerships with institutions, and having international rotations as part of routine training.

Clearly there is a gap in medical education in terms of global health. Many students whose schools do not offer structured opportunities to participate in global health are seeking those opportunities on their own.^{10-12,14} Student-directed experiences can be less than ideal, as they may have significant organizational and financial barriers associated with them. The lack of oversight and mentoring poses challenges for the medical student and can create safety and ethical concerns related to unsupervised learning and navigating vulnerable populations.

As obstetrics and gynecology physicians and educators, we are uniquely positioned to deliver global health training and experiences for medical students. Obstetrics and gynecology is a specialty

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TABLE 1

Sample institutions offering medical student obstetrics and gynecology global health experiences

Institution	Brief description	Cost consideration	World Wide Web site
Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, Bronx, NY	Seminar series for third- and fourth-years students at home institution; clinical and research experience in host country	Funding for airfare, room and board, and some project expenses available to students through fellowships	http://www.einstein.yu.edu/departments/obgyn/global-women-health-programs/educational-programs.aspx
Boston Medical Center, Boston, MA	Series of educational activities throughout the year for students, residents, and faculty interested in global health; provides a conduit for research, programmatic, and clinical opportunities for students	Stipends available for language classes; partial funding available to students through grants, although most programs require students to pay travel	http://www.bmc.org/obgyn/services/global-health.htm
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD	Resources to set up an individual scholarly project between first and second year; resources for third- and fourth-year students to set up individual electives overseas	Funding for global experiences and projects available to students through competitive grants; other global electives may be funded through the program director's grant	http://www.hopkinsglobalhealth.org/
University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Chapel Hill, NC	Clinical and research selectives and electives available for students interested in women's health; intern program for rising fourth-year students that includes 1 year of research and clinical work with specific focus on maternal child health	The Office of International Activities (a branch of the Office of Student Affairs) provides funding opportunities and directs students to external funding opportunities; the Medical Foundation (a not-for-profit organization) also helps secure resources and funding	https://www.med.unc.edu/obgyn/global-womens-health
University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, CA	Global health concentration includes a 3-month project with the majority of that time abroad; mentorship to obtain obstetrics and gynecology-specific experiences	Partial funding available to students through grants	http://meded.ucsf.edu/gh
Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, Providence, RI	Scholarly concentration in global health includes a summer experience between first and second year, global health seminars during second year, and a scholarly project completed in fourth year; mentorship to obtain obstetrics and gynecology-specific experiences	Partial funding available to students through grants	http://brown.edu/academics/medical/education/concentrations/global-health

Websites most recently accessed Jan. 6, 2014.

Hampton. Obstetrics/gynecology medical student global health experiences. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2014.

rich in topics that are important, as well as abundant, in global health. These include maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality; genital fistula formation; cervical cancer screening and treatment; family planning and contraception; sexually transmitted infection and human immunodeficiency virus education, detection, and treatment; gender-based violence; sex trafficking; and the public health interventions that positively address these issues. Medical students are unique learners, have the potential to make change, and have an untarnished sense of idealism.¹⁵ By creating obstetrics

and gynecology global health learning opportunities for medical students, we have the ability to create high-impact experiences and the potential to generate positive change and outcomes for our specialty and women's health worldwide.

Options for integration of obstetrics and gynecology global health into the undergraduate medical curriculum

At the medical school level, global health learning can be an elective choice for students with high-level interest or an integrated core competency for all

students. It is important for obstetrics and gynecology educators to become familiar with established global health learning opportunities at their institutions. If a global health curriculum currently exists, obstetrics and gynecology global health learning topics can be integrated into that curriculum. Goldner and Bollinger⁶ describe a first-year medical student global health course at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, that leverages technology to incorporate live video conferencing with partner institutions abroad. Obstetrics and gynecology faculty leaders at Johns

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