

Issues in Global Health: An Elective Experience for Third Year Medical Students

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BACKGROUND

Flexible Clinical Experiences (FCEs) are one week opportunities for third year medical students at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) to engage in self-directed learning by allowing them to either choose from a diverse offering of pre-designed electives or to design their own elective experience. FCE options include exposure to research, educational modules, and clinical experiences.

[The FCE Program](#) at UMMS allows students the opportunity for individual exploration in an area that is of particular interest to them. This enables them to receive mentorship, acquire early exposure to a field they are considering, and deepen their understanding of that area.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in global health (GH) among medical students in the U.S. and internationally. However, due to the rigors of undergraduate studies and the constraints of the training path, many students may not have had as much opportunity as they would have wanted to travel overseas or to learn about GH prior to their third year of medical school. Such exposure might influence the specialty they consider, as well as decisions to pursue research or policy work related to GH.

In order to equip medical students with a basic understanding of GH issues, a new FCE titled *Issues in Global Health* was introduced in 2016. This FCE provides students with a foundation of GH through the study of common medical conditions, key players in the field, and strategies to decrease morbidity and mortality worldwide.



CURRICULUM

The *Issues in Global Health* FCE includes self-directed educational modules where students listen to six narrated presentations and complete a post-quiz after each one. Students may work at their own pace over the course of the elective. The six topics include:

- Millennium Development Goals and Overview of Global Health
- Parasitic Infections
- HIV/AIDS
- Malaria
- Tuberculosis
- Malnutrition

After completing these learning modules, students identify a specific global health topic that they are interested in, and complete a brief paper on their identified topic which is within one of these categories:

- Current events in global health
- Specific diseases or health issues
- Key organizations and leaders in global health
- The health situation of a specific low-income country

PARTICIPANTS

Since the introduction of the *Issues in Global Health* FCE in January 2016, 24 students have participated, of which 12 were males and 12 were females. Some students had already settled on which specialty they would be pursuing, while others were undecided.

Prior experience in GH ranged from no prior exposure, to having spent several months overseas. All students performed well on quizzes, with all scoring over 90% and most receiving 100% all on six quizzes. Paper topics included Zika virus, impact of Syrian civil war on healthcare, mental health services in low income countries, and global antibiotic resistance.

FEEDBACK

Student evaluations from the past year found that this FCE:

- Increased understanding of the topic of GH
 - 95% to a great extent
 - 5% to some extent
- Increased competency in independent learning
 - 89% to a great extent
 - 11% to some extent
- Reaffirmed prior career plan (100% agreed)
 - 50% strongly agree
 - 50% agree
- Students should recommend this FCE to other students
 - 100% strongly agree

CONCLUSIONS

The *Issues in Global Health* FCE has been an effective way to expose third year medical students to the field of GH. Students have varied in their prior experience in GH and also varied in intended residency specialty. All students agreed the course increased their understanding of GH topics, increased their competency of independent learning, reaffirmed their career plans, and all said they would recommend this course to other students.