Evaluating the potential impact of global health teaching in undergraduate medical education: what are we teaching and what are students learning?

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Introduction
With a growing awareness of the importance of global health, the GMC has introduced a new learning outcome for UK medical students1: “Discuss from a global perspective the determinants of health and disease and variations in health care delivery and medical practice.”

Global health teaching in the core curriculum at King’s College London School of Medicine (KCLSM) includes:

• A global health symposium and choice of workshops in phase 4 (penultimate year)
• An eight week elective rotation between phases 4 & 5 (final year)
• A global health essay (1000 words on topic of choice) as part of their 5000 word pre-elective portfolio which also includes personal aims and objectives; a record of evolving plans and reflections; and an account of the demographics and local health issues of their elective destination.

This is part of an integrated programme exploring the social determinants of health (SDH) across the final three years at KCLSM.

Goals
• To explore what students gained from their global health workshops and portfolio essays.
• To identify how this process contributed to students’ elective preparations.

Method
All 421 students’ portfolios submitted in 2012 were analysed identifying planned elective destinations (countries). A random selection of 10% of the global health essays (n=43) from these portfolios were analysed for content and for students’ reflections on their learning (quotes given above).

Results
69% of students spent at least part of their elective in low/middle income countries. Students selected a broad range of topics for in-depth analysis with most linking their global health essays to their elective destinations and plans. Themes from the global health symposium and workshops, such as global mental health, were strongly represented in essays, demonstrating a lasting impact from this teaching. Students demonstrated an ability to apply their previous learning on social and public health issues to global health topics. Student reflections on the impact of the portfolio on their learning included:

• being more prepared for local health issues
• making more informed elective choices
• using the elective to proactively achieve their own goals.

Elective destinations by country income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Number of Electives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Income Countries</td>
<td>128 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>132 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low and Middle Income</td>
<td>161 (31%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion & conclusions
Teaching on health and its determinants can be challenging for medical educators2, and this extends to global health. Student engagement in this programme may have been facilitated by the student choice of workshops at the symposium which introduced an internally motivated, self-directed element, and linking global health essays to elective plans which gave practical relevance to students’ learning.

Further analysis is required to evaluate how these preparations impacted on their elective experiences.

Global health teaching within the overall SDH programme

Phase 3
• Patient-centred approaches to clinical communication
• Behaviour change counselling

Phase 4
• Longitudinal pregnancy study
• Health promotion review
• Global health

Phase 5
• Community case studies
• Obesity study
• Social and exercise prescribing

Phases 3-5
• Smoking cessation certification
• Self-selected component opportunities

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References
1. Tomorrow’s Doctors, 2009, General Medical Council