



Do Medical Students Need International Health Electives? Uluslararası Seçmeli Rotasyon Tıp Öğrencileri İçin Gerekli mi?

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Dear Editor;

International health electives (IHE), allowing medical students to travel to different countries, render substantial educational outcomes in three major areas, observing health care services in another country, improving communication skills and providing familiarity with diseases that are not encountered in their own countries (1). IHE have been in the curricula of many medical schools for undergraduate as well as postgraduate education in the US and Europe for almost four decades. In a study carried out among surgery residents who have traveled abroad, 94% of them found IHE programs useful for the acquisition of surgical skills under supervision of an attending faculty (2).

Data from the Association of American Medical Colleges shows that the number of medical students who demand to go abroad as a part of medical education has increased approximately five-fold since the program was adapted to the medical school curriculum in 1978.

Dr Eckhart, the director of academic programs at Harvard Medical International, gives noteworthy advice to a medical student in Liberia, Africa who is asking how to manage a child with severe diarrhea even without knowing blood electrolyte levels: "Well, you have this child in front of you and you have to make a decision. So what can you learn, without a backup laboratory, from the history and physical examination to help you manage the patient?"(3).

Indiana University Medical School Family Medicine Clerkship Program has successfully completed two different programs in developing a global health elective for fourth-year medical students in Honduras and El Salvador. The Family Medicine department has also taken the initiative to extend the IHE for the residents to care for special needs of children in Chinese orphanages. Some programs such as Erasmus, support Turkish students financially to observe the European medical education system.

However, medical schools in Turkey do not have "curriculum based" IHE programs for resource poor countries nor other overseas nations. An initiative is needed to address IHE for Turkish medical students in the era of globalization.

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