Medicine without Borders: A Literature Review of International Medical Missions

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What is a medical mission?

- Humanitarian medicine
- Voluntourism
- Surgical brigades
- Medical brigade
- Volunteer missions
- Medical mission
- Short term medical outreach
- International cooperation programs
- Surgical missions
- Short term humanitarian health care projects
- Medical tourism
- International outreach
- Volunteer medical services
- Overseas volunteer surgical team
- Humanitarian mission
- International volunteer surgical trips
- Short term humanitarian surgical programs
- Medical humanitarian effort
- Medical humanist efforts
- Medical humanitarian effort
- Humanitarian surgical programs
- Humanitarian medical missions
- Medical humanitarian efforts
What is a medical mission?
What is a medical mission?

Focused on 3 features of international medical missions:

• Time-bound
• LMIC destination
• Direct medical services
“A short trip of **one day to two years** by a healthcare professional to a **low- or middle-income country**…to provide **direct medical care** to the population at large, or to a particular subset of the population identified by their particular health need, age group, or cultural group”

-Martiniuk et al. (2010)
What is a medical mission?

- Faith-based organizations
- Universities
- Secular nonprofits
- Self-organized groups
- Paid programs
Medical Missions on the Rise

30% medical school graduates had at least one global health experience during their training (AAMC 2013)

90% US medical schools offer global health opportunities (Khan et al., 2013)
Medical Missions on the Rise

Connecting Volunteers With Medical Mission Organizations

MedicalMissions.org is a 501(c)(3) organization that connects medical volunteers and other volunteers with organizations sponsoring medical missions all over the world. Our services are 100 percent free for both medical volunteers who register and mission organizations posting their opportunities. The goal of MedicalMissions.org is to connect motivated healthcare providers with organizations sponsoring medical missions by offering a free, searchable database of health-related volunteer opportunities and medical mission trips. These include short and long-term medical volunteer opportunities, both domestic and international.

MedicalMissions.org was founded in 2009 by Jackson Healthcare as part of Jackson Healthcare Charities. To learn more, please follow us on Facebook at Facebook.com/medicalmissions. You can also download our factsheet 📄.

Search - Connect - Serve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Practice</td>
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<td>Afghanistan (1)</td>
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<td>Dental Professional</td>
<td>Acute Care (187)</td>
<td>Bangladesh (13)</td>
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<td>Nurse (16223)</td>
<td>Addiction Medicine (94)</td>
<td>Brazil (35)</td>
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<td>Other (462)</td>
<td>Administration-Management (88)</td>
<td>Cameroun (86)</td>
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<td>Pharmacist (54)</td>
<td>Advanced Practice-Clinical Nurse (195)</td>
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<td>Advanced Practice-CRNA (175)</td>
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<td>Advanced Practice-Nurse Midwife (212)</td>
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<td>Allergy (168)</td>
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<td>India (230)</td>
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<td>Jamaica (2)</td>
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Region

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<td>Africa (25866)</td>
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<td>Asia &amp; Oceania (1300)</td>
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<td>Europe &amp; Russia (57)</td>
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<td>Middle East (25)</td>
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<td>North America (188)</td>
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Understanding Medical Missions

One goal: understand if/how medical missions contribute to health systems strengthening

Pre-requisites:
- Where do teams come from?
- Where do they go?
- How long do they stay for?
- What do they do?
- Do they link to the local healthcare system? If so, how?
Understanding Medical Missions

• Martiniuk et al. (2012):
  • 230 articles
  • Sending countries: US, Canada
  • Recipient country: Honduras
  • Recipient region: Africa
  • Wide range of mission types
Objectives

1. To update the literature review conducted by Martiniuk et al. (2012) by describing current trends in the literature on medical missions over the last four years

2. To identify if and how missions link to recipient countries’ healthcare systems
Inclusion Criteria

• PubMed-indexed
• Published 1/1/2010 – 8/1/2014
• LMIC Recipient country
• 1 day - 2 years
• Article in English, Spanish, or German
• Disaster/emergency medicine
• Military medicine
• Narrow focus on medical school curricula
• Profiles specific organization or individual
PRISMA Flowchart

Identification

1548 records identified through PubMed

Screening

1544 records after duplicates removed

4 duplicates excluded

1544 records screened

1243 records excluded

1048 excluded after title review

195 excluded after abstract review

Eligibility

301 full-text articles assessed for eligibility

149 articles excluded

Reasons for exclusion:
- Off topic (48)
- Disaster or military medicine (18)
- Narrow focus on school curriculum (19)
- Not in a LMIC (1)
- Within-country mission (10)
- Profile of organization or provider (16)
- Other (37)

Included

152 articles included
Main Results
Mostly Descriptive Studies

- Descriptive: 47%
- Theoretical: 32%
- Critical Appraisal: 21%
Mostly Implementation-Focused

- Implementation: 43%
- Personal Accounts: 24%
- Ethics: 15%
- Best Practices: 14%
- Pt Experiences: 3%
- Health Policy: 1%

Boston University School of Public Health
Recipient Countries

[Map showing recipient countries with different shades indicating the number of recipients: 0, 1-2, 3-6, 7+]

Boston University School of Public Health
• 33% lacked detail on duration of STMM

• Of those articles with duration specified:
  • 84% lasted < 30 days (average: 8 days)
  • 11% lasted between 1 and 6 months
  • 5% lasted between 6 months and 2 years
Team Size

• 52% lacked detail about team size

• Among articles that specified it, great variation in team size:
  • 31%: <6 people
  • 31%: >20 people
  • Median team size: 9 people
Student Involvement

• 38% of articles explicitly state that students participated in the mission
Health System Links

• 74% of descriptive articles mentioned 1+ link to the local healthcare system
  
  • Most common links:
    • inclusion of 1+ local healthcare provider during mission
    • use of a local healthcare facility
  
  • Least common links:
    • registration with the local government
    • referral of patients to the local healthcare system
Summary of Main Findings

- Fast growth in literature on medical missions
- Mostly descriptive
- Most missions < 30 days
- Student participation
- Limited health links
Limitations

- Searched PubMed only
- Publishing bias
- Shortcomings in reporting
Next Steps

• Extract further details on links

• Expand data sources
Thank you!

• For more information:

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