

The Impact of a Medical Mission Trip Abroad on Undergraduate Students

Mary M. Loeb
Nicole Murry, PhD, RN

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of University of Texas at Austin (UT) undergraduate students in pursuit of a future career in healthcare who traveled abroad on a medical mission trip to Ghana, Africa through Global Medical Brigades in January 2020. This qualitative study incorporated a phenomenological framework to better understand the richness of the student experience of learning about health promotion through hands on experience and cultural immersion. A purposive sample was recruited using snowball sampling. Six undergraduate UT students – 4 women and 2 men - who participated in the Global Medical Brigades medical mission trip to Ghana in January 2020 were interviewed using a semi-structured script. Transcribed data were analyzed for common themes regarding the students' experiences. Five overall themes among student participants were identified: (a) cultural immersion, (b) exposure to unique clinical experiences, (c) deeper understanding of physical environment on health, (d) a reassurance or alteration in personal healthcare career trajectory, (e) personal growth and challenges. This medical mission trip provided a unique experience and important skill set for future healthcare providers that would not be possible in a traditional clinical setting in the United States. Participants reflected on their own professional development through hands-on health promoting activities in this underserved population. The personal growth experienced by each participant and key takeaways as described by the five overall themes can be used by the participants in their future profession in healthcare. This experience will contribute to the making of a well-rounded, holistic healthcare provider with cultural humility and sensitivity because of the uniqueness of this experience abroad.