

## Do 'The Four Principles' Apply to the Improvement of Short-Term Clinical Electives?

### Será que 'Os Quatro Princípios' se Aplicam à Melhoria dos Estágios Clínicos Opcionais de Curta-Duração?

**Keywords:** Education, Medical; Global Health; International Educational Exchange; Students, Medical

**Palavras-chave:** Alunos de Medicina; Educação de Graduação em Medicina; Intercâmbio Educacional Internacional; Saúde Global

Dear Editor,

After reading Revés J and Loh LC's article<sup>1</sup> we were impressed with the authors' four key principles to improve students' involvement in short-term experiences in global health (STEGH), namely appropriate preparation, evaluation, reciprocity and supervision.

These principles may also apply to the case of short-term clinical electives in medical schools in Japan, as well as to STEGH in São Tomé Island. As international officers, we were intuitively aware of the same principles and problems, although in completely different circumstances.

In our elective program, exchange students can select and rotate into any department in the host university hospital within one or two months.<sup>2</sup> We conducted interviews with domestic students who were engaged in supporting overseas international exchange students. In the interviews, we

asked about the problems faced by international students. After the interviews, *verbatim* transcripts were codified and organized into categories. Three major problems were identified: 1) language and communication; 2) lodging; 3) practice of limited observational style (Table 1).

Problem 3) may be deeply related with patient safety issues as in STEGH. The STEGH case, while undoubtedly affording students unique study experiences, may compromise the safety of the local patients unless the sending institutions develop a careful educational plan.<sup>1,3</sup> In our elective cases, host-side supervisors always show concern for their patients' safety, which may be why exchange students' activities are limited to shadowing/observership, even if they are eligible for internship/clerkship.

While the authors' university has accepted many excellent students from all over the world in previous years, there have yet been no students from Portugal. Although both we and the Portuguese<sup>4</sup> are currently experiencing difficulties due to COVID-19, we expect that the situation will soon stabilize, and Portuguese students may enjoy exchanges in our school of medicine.

The publication of this definition is believed to contribute to clarify both professionals and the public; the latitude and the flexibility of its concepts and term should remain valid over a long period of time.

Table 1 – Interview results

Categories	Brief explanation and example comment
1) Language and communication	Communication difficulties due to insufficient fluency in English: "International students had to attend lectures where they only spoke in Japanese."
2) Lodging	Staying places being too far from university/hospital: "Lodging was far away from the university, and commuting was inconvenient."
3) Practice of limited observational style	Limited to observership, despite being eligible for clerkship: "There were many things I wasn't allowed to do and I was treated like an outsider."

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Kotaro MATOBA<sup>1</sup>, Manabu MURAKAMI<sup>2</sup>, Hideki HYODOH<sup>1</sup>

1. Department of Forensic Medicine. Faculty of Medicine. Hokkaido University. Kita-ku. Sapporo. Hokkaido. Japan.

2. Center for Medical Education and International Relations. Faculty of Medicine. Hokkaido University. Kita-ku. Sapporo. Hokkaido. Japan.

Autor correspondente: Manabu Murakami. [mmanabu@med.hokudai.ac.jp](mailto:mmanabu@med.hokudai.ac.jp)

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