

Policy Statement on Student Health Partnerships

Adopted at SGA 2014, York

Summary

Student Health Partnerships are sustainable relationships between two academic institutions for the mutual benefit of students, local populations and global health. They offer a potential solution to some of the ethical issues with student volunteering abroad. This policy statement commits Medsin-UK to investigate ways to support student health partnerships.

Introduction

Medsin provides a unique meeting ground for cultural exchange and shared learning, and reinforces this with its established exchange systems. There is an international movement encouraging the creation of health partnerships between health institutions in different countries [1]. A number of branches already engage in student-led Health Partnerships, which have a range of activity, and operate for the mutual benefit of both parties. There are currently no formal structures for the support of Student Health Partnerships by Medsin, but the federation has great potential to support Student Health Partnerships with the administration of exchanges, the collection and dissemination of best practice, and by supporting branches who wish to develop new health partnerships.

Main text

Medsin-UK recognises that:

- The definition of a Student Health Partnership (SHP) is a long-term, sustainable student-led partnership between two or more organisations such as, higher education institutes, NMO local committees, public sector or democratic non-profit organisations. Student Health Partnerships facilitate cultural exchange and shared learning between the student bodies of the respective institutions, for the mutual benefit of both partners. This is analogous to health partnerships run by qualified professionals, such as those supported by the THET [2] who partner with various international institutions.
- Student Health Partnerships exist to improve the health of local and global populations.
- The activity of a Student Partnership should be planned to meet needs identified in on the basis of needs assessments conducted in each locality.
- Student Health Partnerships are valuable structures that can sustainably:
 - build capacity by hosting bilateral professional, public health and research opportunities for students of a variety of disciplines
 - facilitate shared learning and mentoring through online platforms such as MedicineAfrica [3]
 - provide a platform for peer-led skills training to assist the personal development of students
 - and the development of student projects and unions
 - and support the creation and development of student-led societies, organisations, community projects and unions.
- Conventional medical electives can pose a number of ethical challenges [4]. Student Health

Partnerships offer an alternative which addresses many of these ethical issues by strengthening existing administrative structures in a sustainable and culturally sensitive way and targeting and pre-planning placements to suit the skills of students, and the needs of the host partner. Pre-departure training also benefits from the institutional memory and cultural experience which can only be gained by working in sustained partnership

- Several branches already have programmes that fall within the above definition of a Student Health Partnership.
- That Student Health Partnerships could provide a stable platform for recurring Medsin National exchanges.

Medsin commits to:

- Investigate the potential use of National Exchange programmes within existing and future Student Health Partnerships,
- Host discussions throughout the network and at future GAs, on the best way to support Student Health Partnerships develop resources and structures to support branches who wish to develop new Student Health Partnerships
- Collect and disseminate evidence of good practice from existing Student Health Partnerships.

References

1. www.thet.org/our-work/what-is-a-health-partnership
2. www.thet.org
3. www.medicinafrica.com
4. Ethics and medical electives in resource-poor countries: A tool kit, British Medical Association, 2009