

**The Ethics of Medical Voluntourism:  
the Conceptualization and Management of ‘Doing Harm’ Within the Business**

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**Abstract**

**Keywords:** medical voluntourism, ethical controversies, business, community involvement, harm

**Background:** Although medical voluntourism programs are rapidly growing in popularity, deep ethical controversies overly the industry. In particular, understanding how the field of medical voluntourism follows a business model sheds insight on the sources of tension and conflicts of interest that can arise within organizations and the sector as a whole. However, understanding the roles of individual motivations and societal pressures in the development of these ethical controversies is relatively unexplored.

**Methods:** Through an inductive thematic analysis of data gathered from literature review and expert interviews, this project investigates these driving factors behind the rapidly growing business, how these driving factors contribute to ethical controversies, and how harm is often inadvertently done through medical voluntourism.

**Results:** This research project shows that the medical voluntourism business is self-serving and often unequally prioritizes the desires of its participants over the needs of the communities it serves.

**Conclusions:** This project also concludes that the lack of an overarching ethical framework leaves the door open for harm to be done both through individual and social channels. The ethical dilemmas that abound the medical voluntourism business do not fully preclude opportunities for mutually beneficial experiences, but further regulation is warranted.