

Global Health in Ottawa: An Interview with Dr. Anne McCarthy, Lead for Undergraduate Medical Education in Global Health

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Anne McCarthy, MD, is the Lead for Undergraduate Medical Education in Global Health at the University of Ottawa. She is also the director of the Tropical Medicine and International Health Clinic at the Ottawa Hospital. For more than two decades, she has been involved with travel medicine on a clinical, research and policy level. She has been especially committed to preparing medical trainees for safe and ethical electives in resource poor settings. Her exceptional dedication was recognized in 2011 when she was presented with the “Department of Medicine Education Award.” In this interview, Dr. McCarthy shares her invaluable experiences working in the field of global health over the years as well as details of the Global Health program at the University of Ottawa.

RÉSUMÉ

Dre Anne McCarthy, MD, est responsable de la formation médicale de premier cycle en santé mondiale à l'Université d'Ottawa. Elle est également la directrice de la Clinique médicale des voyageurs internationaux à l'Hôpital d'Ottawa. Depuis plus de deux décennies, elle est impliquée dans le domaine de la médecine des voyages, à la fois sur le plan clinique, politique et de la recherche. Elle s'est particulièrement consacrée à préparer les étudiants en médecine à faire des stages sécuritaires et éthiques dans des milieux pauvres en ressources. En 2011, son dévouement exceptionnel a été récompensé par le Prix d'Éducation du Département de Médecine. Dans cette entrevue, Dre McCarthy partage ses expériences inestimables lors de son travail en santé mondiale au fil des ans, ainsi que des détails sur le programme de santé mondiale à l'Université d'Ottawa.

PLEASE TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR CAREER PATH, AND YOUR BACKGROUND IN GLOBAL HEALTH.

After completing my residency in internal medicine with the Canadian military, I decided to enroll in infectious diseases to become a tropical medicine specialist. This specialty provides exceptional background on global health related diseases. The military also exposed me to a variety of experiences that I would not have gotten otherwise. I got deployed a number of times into tropical countries, and we often took part in international humanitarian work. These unique experiences ranged from looking after orphans in Rwanda, establishing a family medicine program in South Africa, to providing medical training courses in Thailand and Cambodia. Over the years, I also got involved with the global health team in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ottawa. Initially, I was invited to teach an informal global health course in the early 90s; I have been here ever since. Part of my role also included teaching and supporting students who are going on international electives with pre-departure trainings. Even-

tually, a team of very talented individuals along with myself created a global health program at the faculty.

WHAT IS GLOBAL HEALTH TO YOU?

My view of global health aligns with the World Health Organization's doctrine: health is more than being free of disease [1]. The clinicians must look beyond delivering one-on-one healthcare by exploring the social determinants related to their patients, such as their living conditions, diet and sanitation. Global health means more than just delivering healthcare, which is what most of us do here; it's about trying to look beyond that to make a difference.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT CANADA'S EFFORTS TO AID SYRIAN REFUGEES?

As you know, the previous government has tried to cut back on healthcare coverage for refugees. We need to help these indi-

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Interview

individuals who are new to Canada to be as healthy as they can be to improve their quality of lives. In Canada, many physicians and physician organizations like the Royal College have taken a stand to support refugees. In Ottawa, we are marching in Parliament Hill almost every year to let the public know about the importance of securing healthcare access for refugees. We are very lucky that we have a strong contingent of individuals who are interested in refugee and migrant health.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS MEDICAL STUDENTS CAN AID THE SYRIAN REFUGEES?

I would encourage medical students to get involved at our local community health centres, which are very supportive of Syrian and other refugees. It gives excellent opportunities for medical students to learn about the refugee situation through electives. There is also the Refugee Health and the Global Health Interest Group that organize programs where students get to accompany a refugee family to their medical appointments. This is not only a huge aid to the families but also allows the students to learn about how to navigate our healthcare system. I think these are amazing opportunities which will hopefully allow our students to provide better care to our community in the future.

COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT OUR CURRENT GLOBAL HEALTH CURRICULUM?

Our Global Health curriculum was recently updated to add 12-14 hours of introductory lectures in the spring for 2nd year pre-clerkship students. This will include sessions on emerging infectious disease, cultural competency, refugee health, maternal & child health, and international adoption. We also started a Global Health Concentration (name undetermined) that provides recognition for students who partake in extra global health education outside of the curriculum. This concentration provides self-directed learning and group activities over the 4 years of medical school. Please stay tuned for more details regarding this. We hope this will encourage students to use opportunities around them like the Global Health Journal Club, attending sessions or talks, conferences by the Global Health Interest Group, and pre-departure trainings. We are doing our best to provide the backbone for students who want to be involved in global health internationally. Specifically, we are putting effort to make the experience safe for the patients as well as for the trainees. This training will also prepare the students to take care of the multi-cultural population in Canada. It is designed to serve both purposes.

COULD YOU TALK ABOUT SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR RECENT PROJECTS?

Much of what I am doing recently involves medical education

scholarship. I worked on expanding our knowledge and publishing articles on ways to prepare and support individuals who are doing global health electives. We recently did a scoping review to help develop the pre-departure modules and training. Based on the evidence from that review, our first official debriefing session took place a couple months ago. It was very well received and it involved students bringing in photographs that they have taken from their time away to reflect on it. Interestingly enough, we had 23 students who submitted different photos, and all of them showcased almost identical themes. It doesn't really matter where you go, it is similar things that you experience.

We are also doing qualitative research to develop surgical pre-departure modules. We try to make it evidence based or at least evidence informed to create a different curriculum. The modules are evaluated over time to see if individuals are improving, how they are doing in terms of global health competency. We hope these evaluations will reflect the benefits of these modules in the near future.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE THE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

What I love the most is the diverse group of individuals I interact with during my job. It's always different with respect to exactly what I'm doing. For example, when I was in Thailand our main collaborator was with Mahidol University in Bangkok. We established a training course for physicians about global health with many local instructors as well as Western teachers. I'm always learning from my interaction with such individuals from different cultures and I love every part of it.

ARE THERE ASPECTS OF YOUR JOB THAT YOU DON'T NECESSARILY ENJOY AS MUCH?

There are frustrations here and there all the time, but there is nothing that I hate about my job. I believe we are blessed as physicians to have choices. I feel very privileged that I love what I do. Whenever I do work related to global health I find it very humbling.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS?

I would advise medical students to explore their interests in global health early on. The best time to be a part of global health is when you are young with less responsibilities. If students decide to engage in it later during their career, it may be difficult due to other commitments, such as family. I know of many physicians who travel early in their career, wait until they stabilize and travel again.

It is always important to keep an open mind, listen, and keep your sense of humour. Students may have specific expectations

when they are going on a global health elective, but it may not go as they have planned. In fact, they may feel lost or helpless especially when they are only in those communities for 2 to 3 weeks. However, even in such circumstances, keep a good attitude, ask questions, listen, figure out what's going on, and they will always find something rewarding.

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REFERENCES

1. WHO Definition of Health [Internet]. World Health Organization; 2003 [cited 2016 Oct 27]. Available from: <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html>.