

# Beyond Good Intentions: Why Attitudes Matter on International Medical Service Trips

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**ABSTRACT:** The volunteer abroad industry has rapidly expanded in recent years, with some estimating the net worth of the industry to be upwards of \$173 billion a year (The Wilson Quarterly). With tens of thousands of volunteers, including thousands of pre-health college students, volunteering abroad a year, it is important to be aware of the ethical impacts of the ever-growing field of “voluntourism”.

In this brief editorial, I advocate that pre-health students ought to adopt an attitudes-based framework to discern if an international medical service trip is ethically permissible. After a reflection of my own experience as an international volunteer, I examine the ways in which international medical service trips benefit and harm volunteers and community members. I argue that the qualities of “excellence” and “humility” are crucial for students to consider when searching for an international medical service trip, if they decide to participate on one. I include an framework of some questions students should ask when evaluating international medical service trips.

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