

POLICY FORUM

International Health Initiatives in North Carolina

Introduction

We readily understand that health and health care are becoming an increasingly global concern, but how this plays out locally is less well understood. In these times, North Carolinians are much more likely to feel the effects of an infectious disease outbreak that originates beyond the borders of the United States because we are much more connected to populations on other continents. We are beginning to see the emergence of a global market for health care services, as "medical tourism" and the international trade in pharmaceuticals grow and influence the prices we pay and the opportunities we confront in choosing therapies. North Carolinians lead in the development of cures for diseases that are endemic far from our laboratories, and we develop systems to help ensure clean air and water and effective public health delivery systems in nations on all continents. The global reach of these discoveries and developments is extraordinary, but they are often equally applicable in our own communities.

North Carolina and the rest of the nation draw on the skills of health care professionals from many other countries. We are recognizing that we have responsibilities beyond our borders for training health professionals to care for other populations. We can easily recognize a global market for pharmaceuticals and health technology, and we are beginning to see that this can apply to health-associated human resources, as well. This happens in the short term as North Carolinians are touched by the crises and disasters that affect other nations and contribute their skills and resources to caring for people who have extraordinary needs. In the long term, we are seeing collaborations being built, with North Carolina institutions and programs connecting across the globe to train practitioners for the world and for our state.

These conditions compel North Carolinians to compete in global markets and to help seek solutions to global needs. This issue of the NCMJ highlights how our health care professionals and institutions in the state fit into global health and how global health conditions and needs affect North Carolina.

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