

Examining Neo-colonialism and Power in Global Surgical Missions: An Historical, Practical and Ethical Analysis

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Abstract : Neo-colonialism is defined as the use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies, and concerns have been raised about its presence in surgical missions. Surgical missions aim to rectify the huge disparity in surgical access worldwide, but their ethics must be carefully considered. This is especially in light of colonial history which affects international relations and global health today, to ensure that colonial attitudes are not influencing efforts to promote equity. This review examines the history of colonial global health, demonstrating that global health initiatives have consistently been used to benefit those providing them, and then asks whether elements of colonialism are still pervasive in surgical missions today. Data was collected from the literature using specified search terms and snowball searching, as well as from international expert web-based conferences on global surgery ethics. A thematic analysis was then conducted on this data, resulting in the identification of six themes which are identifiable in both past and present global health initiatives. These six themes are power, lack of understanding or respect, feelings of superiority, exploitation, enabling of dependency, and acceptance of poorer standards of care. An ethical analysis follows, concluding that the concerns of power and neo-colonialism in global surgery would be addressed by adopting a framework of procedural justice that promotes a refined governance process in which stakeholders are able to propose and reject decisions that affect them. The paper argues that adopting this model would address concerns of the power disparity in the field directly, as well as promoting an ethical framework to enable the other concerns of power disparity and neo-colonialism identified in the present analysis to be addressed.

Keywords : medical ethics, global surgery, global health, neocolonialism, surgical missions

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