



*Elective ethical toolkit – an essential for medical students working abroad*



1) Go on elective with a friend or choose a host hospital where there will be other medical students. At a minimum, ensure you can have reliable contact with family/friends at home in case you find yourself dealing with emotionally difficult situations. Your university can also support you.



2) Keep yourself well physically, mentally and emotionally. Do not take unnecessary risks and do not neglect usual coping mechanisms or sources of support.



3) Refresh your latest life support training (ILS/BLS) before you travel. Check local protocols for emergencies when you arrive. Avoid being in high risk areas (A&E, maternity ward, theatre) without a senior staff member. If an emergency occurs, trust in your training and send for help.



4) Decide in advance of starting on a ward/department what procedures you would and would not do, and under what conditions. Stick to this as it has been made with clear judgement. Decline offers politely or ask to observe this time.



5) Patient safety is always paramount. If you see a patient at risk of harm inform a senior immediately. Do not let the fear of being perceived as rude interfere with your better instincts.



6) It is not your responsibility to project your ethical standards on to all the health care staff you work with on elective. When observing take small steps where possible, such as drawing curtains and introducing yourself as a medical student (helpful to learn in local language). However, when you are interacting with a patient you should uphold the same privacy, consent and cleanliness standards that you would when working in your home institution.



7) Communication may be difficult but make every effort. Utilise nurses or family members to translate. Be aware that some patients may have a poor understanding of health care matters or may have been misinformed previously. Remember that non-verbal communication skills still matter.



8) Be mindful of equipment usage but don't compromise patient safety. Take gloves and alcohol gel with you and use them even if other staff discourage it.



9) If you feel your supervision or teaching is overburdening a busy doctor discuss it with them and negotiate a more balanced schedule. Alternatively split your time between other staff.



10) Be open minded and respectful of cultural differences. Ask, ask, ask. Questioning promotes discussion and is the best way to learn and an effective way to tactfully point out practice you believe to be bad.