Rapid Response to Delivering cost effective healthcare through reverse innovation

Reverse innovation, power imbalances, language and avoiding cultural appropriation

Lokugamage AU, Douglass C, Gishen F, Fyffe M

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We thank Skopec, Issa and Harris(1) for their fascinating essay on reverse innovation and note that it could herald an age of more cultural humility for the global north and assist with dissipating any prejudices towards the innovations from the global south. Bringing in new ideas from ‘outside’ requires disrupting entrenched power/ value systems around knowledge, which are inherent in the process of decolonising medicines and devices. Indeed, it chimes with Timms and Mearns book #Newpower,(2) which refers to bottom up power surges (like #MeToo) that are overturning old power hierarchies and protectionism around institutions.

However, we note that even though the authors did not coin the term reverse innovation, the terminology of ‘reverse’ conjures up notions of going backwards which could re-inforce power imbalances through language. Could there be a new term for this type of collaboration? Also, the pitfalls of cultural appropriation should be avoided where by aspects of an oppressed culture being taken out of context by a historically dominant people, who lack the cultural context to properly understand, respect, or utilise these elements.(3)