



the medical center hour

*Medicine & Society in Conversation*

A program of the Center for Health Humanities and Ethics  
University of Virginia School of Medicine

Provided by the University of Virginia School of Medicine and School of Nursing

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

12:00-1:00 p.m. (EST)

**Zoom Webinar:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85229005887>

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*History of the Health Sciences Lecture*

## The Care of Foreigners



Eram Alam, PhD

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Dominique Tobbell, PhD, Moderator

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Covid-19 made apparent a major deficit in the US healthcare system: physician supply was unequal to medical care demand. To urgently address this mismatch, states allowed retired physicians to reenter the workforce, the federal government issued regulations bypassing state licensing rules, and the Trump White House took this urgent need into account. In his June 22, 2020 “Proclamation Suspending Entry to Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak,” President Trump made a notable exception: healthcare professionals able to provide “medical care to individuals who have contracted COVID-19” were welcome to enter the country. This strategy has a long history. Since at least the 1960s, the US has trained fewer doctors than it needs, relying instead on the economically expedient option of soliciting immigrant physicians trained at the expense of other countries. This talk explores the economic, political, and social conditions that inaugurated this migratory regime. Initiated during the Cold War with the passage of the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, this bill expedited the entry of Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs) from postcolonial Asian and sent them to provide care in shortage areas throughout the country. Although conceived as a short-term stopgap measure, this practice has continued unabated for the last sixty years effectively allowing organized medicine and the federal government to defer substantive structural changes in distribution and access to care.

## Resources:

1. Alam, Eram. "Teeth Cleaning in Tijuana: Healthcare Across the US-Mexico Border" (In preparation, Medical Anthropology).
2. Alam, Eram. "The Logistical Body." (In preparation, Public Culture).
3. Alam, Eram. *The Care of Foreigners*. (Under contract, Johns Hopkins University Press).

## Accreditation & Designation Statements



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**Eram Alam, PhD** is an Assistant Professor in the History of Science Department at Harvard University. She specializes in the history of medicine in the long twentieth century with a particular emphasis on US healthcare, race, migration, and the political economy of care. Her first book, *The Care of Foreigners* on which this talk is based, will be out later this year with Johns Hopkins University Press. Alongside this project, she completed an edited volume called *Ordering the Human: The Global Spread of Racial Science* that will be out in May 2024. Her next major project explores logistics and medical tourism.

**Dominique Tobbell, PhD**, Centennial Distinguished Professor of Nursing and director of the Eleanor Crowder Bjoring Center for Nursing History of Inquiry at the University of Virginia. Dr. Tobbell's research examines the complex political, economic, and social relationships that developed among academic institutions, governments, and the health care industry in the decades after World War II and assesses the implications of those relationships for the current health care system.



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