

Sustainable Global Health Outreach in Haiti: Service Learning for Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Students

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable academic partnerships that focus on capacity building can improve health outcomes of patients in resource-challenged international settings. The involvement of primary care nurse practitioner students and faculty in service learning can also foster cultural competency and cultural humility. This article describes program development, roles, and outcomes of 3 outreach ventures between the College of Nursing and Health Professions and a United States–based nongovernment organization at 5 different sites in Haiti. Lessons learned in conducting global health field work at the advanced practice nursing student level both inclusively and as part of an interprofessional team are shared.

Keywords: cultural competency, cultural humility, global health, Haiti, nurse practitioner service learning, sustainability

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The engagement of scholarship and the promotion of knowledge and advanced practice skills of students through sustainable primary care nurse practitioner (NP) learning experiences can serve as a transformational teaching-learning resource. Study abroad programs and global service learning have been used as an adjunct to didactic and traditional clinical course work within undergraduate academic settings for the past 2 decades.^{1–4} These types of experiences for NP students at the master's and post-master's level have not been as common. The immersion of advanced practice nursing students in global health can be used as a strategy to enhance clinical education, cultural competency, and cultural humility. Partnership with a nongovernment organization (NGO) and other health profession students and providers can also support interprofessional education efforts. Most importantly, this type of program can be an important resource in meeting the health needs of underserved populations. The area of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is an international site that can benefit from a sustainable academic-NGO partnership related to health care education and service delivery. The individuals, residing in tent cities and surrounding communes since

the 2010 earthquake, still encounter health conditions related to poor living conditions and lack of access to care.

In addition to embarking on such a partnership, sustainability is critical to ensuring any global health program's success for patients and communities. Meeting the reciprocal needs of all stakeholders involved in such outreach (ie, institutions of higher learning, faculty and students, NGOs, host countries, and, most importantly, the patients or communities served) must be ensured for such experiential service learning to be capacity building and sustainable without harm for all parties. The stakeholders include not only students/faculty and volunteer members of the NGO but also, more importantly, Haitian patients and nonprofessional health care advocates.

This article discusses the experience of NP students and their faculty preceptors in partnership with an NGO and other health care–related disciplines in providing ongoing short-term study-practice abroad immersion experiences in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The service learning activity, while addressing the primary care needs of patients, also meets many of the nursing education competencies found in *Health Professional Education*.⁵ The competencies include the Institute of

Medicine strategies for integrating quality care and experiences into nursing education such as providing patient-centered care, working in interprofessional teams, and using evidence-based practice.⁵ Thus, the manuscript may assist other NP faculty and program directors in meeting these competencies through similar global health service learning experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kohlbray and Daugherty⁶ defined service learning as “an experience that engages students in meeting community needs in an international setting so as to offer a different perspective into community health practices and promote students’ development of cultural competency.”^(p163) Service learning is an “active teaching learning”^{7(p45)} strategy that provides students with a “hands-on approach” to providing health care and meeting education needs. In 2008, the American Association of College of Nursing⁸ recognized the importance of using service learning and the immersion of students in diverse communities to improve nursing education in the area of cultural competency. Two years later, Provision 8 of the *Guide to the Code of Ethics for Nurses: Interpretation and Application* stated that nursing should collaborate with other health professionals to address health needs both nationally and internationally.⁹ Specific to master’s and doctoral level education, while not focusing on global health efforts or service learning, the American Association of College of Nursing¹⁰ noted interprofessional collaboration and evidence-based practice as premises for improving patient and population health.

There are many examples and discussions in the literature that focus on undergraduate nursing and medical education service learning programs in the literature.^{1,11-18} NP programs promoting international health service learning opportunities to their students either as an inclusive advanced practice nursing initiative or as part of an interprofessional team have been less prominent. Green et al¹⁹ reported the results of their study of the cultural competence of a small group of NP, baccalaureate nursing, and medical students resulting from an international experience in Honduras. The mixed methods research revealed an increase in all participants’ ability to provide culturally congruent care and identified common themes such as “stepping

outside my world, connecting with culturally different people, awe of community, and learning innovation.”^{19(pp305-306)}

The importance of preplanning for the experience was emphasized. Preplanning fosters the understanding of students from each of the academic programs related to the health care needs of the patients they were to serve. Preplanning also involves briefing students on the beliefs and values of the host community and allows for predeparture team building.¹⁹ The benefits of service learning also have been noted by Withers et al²⁰ in a diverse group of health professionals and students involved in sustained volunteerism in global health. Through the use of semistructured interviews and observation of the volunteers, they noted that a dedicated facilitator and clear roles and responsibilities for all levels of volunteers were essential for a successful health outreach in an underserved area.

The involvement of NP students in international service learning is a way to enhance clinical education, foster cultural competency and humility, and increase their exposure and knowledge of global health issues affecting populations in today’s world. This type of opportunity is supported by the culturally congruent care model developed by Schim et al²¹ based on the theory of Leininger.²² The model explains the interconnectedness of cultural diversity, awareness, sensitivity, and competence on the provider level and its interaction at the patient level to form desirable outcomes. The sustainability aspect of NP service-learning is based on the conceptual model for partnership and sustainability in global health proposed by Leffers and Mitchell.² The authors of this model also highlight the importance of “cultural perspectives” as 1 of 4 related nurse “partner factors” in their model.²

Gaining cultural competency has been an important component of health care education and role development. In respect to global health, providers need to be aware of the beliefs, values, and language of the host community and show respect for cultural differences. Training in cultural competency assists in sensitizing global health NP faculty and student volunteers to the needs and vulnerabilities of the low-resource communities they serve. The leadership of the primary care NP learning experience recognizes

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