



The "Community Health" column is intended to highlight issues and trends in community health at the local, state, and national level.

By Emily Little

Global Health Care in the Hands of Nurses

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I sat in a conference hall at New York University last October surrounded by people of all different majors and backgrounds connected by a common interest: an interest in learning more about how best to bring health care to low resource settings. The conference was directed at college students who were interested in playing a part in the worldwide struggle to eliminate health disparity and to bring healthcare to the neediest people. Ira C. Magaziner, the chairman of the policy board of the Clinton Foundation and chairman of the Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative, was the conference keynote speaker. He delivered an inspiring speech that stirred many in the audience and struck a particular chord with me as a nursing student. He dramatically articulated the severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa and the dire need for health care in many communities there and on other continents. Then he laid it out for the audience: When it comes to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa, it is the nurses who are saving lives. I was proud to know I was working hard to join a profession that is truly making a difference in the world and in the very places where life is the hardest.

It is never easy being a nurse, but as I move on in my nursing classes and into my clinicals, I have come to realize that it is even harder to be a patient. A nurse is often the only person who can make life easier for the patient. The nursing student must realize that his or her actions often impact a patient for their whole lifetime. For student nurses and professional nurses who get the opportunity to work with the poor and underserved

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in the United States and abroad, their actions and care interventions may be the only health care that patients receive during that year, during pregnancy, during their childhood or even their lifetime.

There are many different facets to health care and without the help of each - physicians, the pharmaceutical industry, researchers, and policy makers – there will be no improvement in eliminating health disparity. There are many organizations working to improve healthcare, but it is vital for nurses to understand that they will often be at the very center of giving care to the populations who need it most. Many places across the globe would benefit from the knowledge and skills of a nurse. The home site of the Global Healthcare Information Network (2007) puts the importance of health care providers into stark perspective:

More than 20,000 people died yesterday from common childhood illnesses, malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and complications of child-birth. Many would still be alive today if they had been attended by an informed health care provider.

It may be difficult for us to see just how we can give in a way that impacts the future of health care. There are many opportunities for us to lend our skills to improve health care for the neediest people, both in small and grand ways. We can support improvement in health care by donating our *time* by volunteering for organizations that accept (and often rely on) volunteer skills. We can show our support by donating what *money* we can to a group like Unite for Sight, Inc., which performs eye surgeries in developing countries. We can also donate our professional voice by supporting candidates who have strong commitments to health care and by writing to elected officials to show our concern for the lack of healthcare.

As Nelson Mandela said in Johannesburg in 2006: "All of us - rich and poor, governments, companies and individuals - share the responsibility of ensuring that everyone has access to information, means of prevention and treatment" (Global Health Information, 2007). Let us nurses and nursing students continue to lead the way for the rest of the globe in helping improve patient outcomes and access to healthcare for everyone. ☺

reference

Global Healthcare Information Network. (2007). Homepage. Retrieved from <http://www.ghi-net.org/> on October 16, 2007.

Some great resources for learning about global and American healthcare in low resource settings include:

The Clinton Foundation:

www.clintonfoundation.org/index.htm

Partners in Health: www.pih.org/home.html

Coalition for Affordable Healthcare: www.cahc.net/

Institute for Healthcare Improvement:

www.ihl.org/ihl/about

Americans for Informed Democracy:

www.aidemocracy.org

Some books to read on the art of giving and about people who have given of themselves include:

Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World by Bill Clinton

Mountains Beyond Mountains: Healing the World: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World by Tracy Kidder

How to Save the World in Your Spare Time by Elizabeth May

Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research that Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life by Stephen Post, Jill Nimark, and Otis Mark

Beyond the White House: Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope by Jimmy Carter

Plus!

Check out the Global Theme Issue journal collaboration: 235 journals from 37 countries publish more than 750 articles to stimulate interest and research in poverty and human development:

www.councilscienceeditors.org/globalthemeissue.cfm