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It's Good to Be Blue: Nursing Study Abroad Blue Zone Experiences in Italy and Greece

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Purpose: Blue Zones are areas of the world where, according to studies performed by National Geographic and other experts, people live measurably longer, happier lives with lower rates of chronic disease and a higher quality of life than they do in the United States. There are five identified Blue Zones, and there are nine common characteristics among these five locations, known as the Power 9. These common characteristics include information pertaining to diet, exercise, relationships, and spirituality. Sardinia, Italy was the first identified Blue Zone, and it has the greatest concentration of male centenarians in the world. Ikaria, Greece has a life expectancy that is 8 years longer than Americans.

Methods: A nursing professor, along with 40 nursing students, traveled to Sardinia, Italy and Ikaria, Greece over the course of two years to explore the culture, lifestyles, and ultimately the Power 9 at work. In both locations, students visited and interviewed centenarians in their homes, visited local markets and stores, met with longevity experts, visited a winery and olive oil mill, participated in a cooking class, and visited Blue Zone villages. They experienced typical celebrations, meals, and social activities. Students and the faculty member analyzed the collected data using a narrative thematic analysis to determine connections to the Power 9 and overall lifestyle characteristics that aid in longevity.

Results: The overall aim of these visits was to research the Blue Zones and draw conclusions about the Power 9 characteristics by interviewing, observing, and analyzing. Additionally, comparisons were made between the two locations. Students immersed themselves into the cultures and brought back information to the local university community and community as a whole. The plan is to implement Blue Zone ideals locally and potentially to implement the Blue Zone Project with the help of the Blue Zone experts.

Conclusion: Visiting the Blue Zone in Sardinia was extremely valuable for nursing students in bringing health promotion ideals back to the community and to patients in a variety of settings. Also, this was an important introduction to qualitative research techniques such as interviewing and qualitative analysis.

Title:

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Abstract Summary:

Blue Zones are areas of the world where people live measurably longer, happier lives with lower rates of chronic disease and higher quality of life than they do in the US. There are five identified Blue Zones, with nine common characteristics, including elements such as diet, exercise, relationships, and spirituality.

Content Outline:

I. Blue Zones Introduction

- A. What are Blue Zones?
- B. What do these areas have in common?

II. Study Abroad Component

- A. Benefits of Study Abroad
- B. How to implement study abroad in nursing courses

III. Experiences with Blue Zone Study Abroad

- A. Sardinia, Italy
- B. Ikaria, Greece

IV. Benefits of Blue Zone Study Abroad

- A. What can nursing students and nurses learn from these Blue Zone experiences?
- B. What are the benefits of these experiences for patients?
- C. How can these experiences benefit communities?

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Author Summary: Jessica Naber is an Associate Professor at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky. She has taught full-time since 2007. She is extremely interested in research related to nursing education, health promotion, and teaching strategies. She frequently has nursing students of all levels working with her on research activities to further their research interests.