

**Sigma's VIRTUAL 31st International Nursing Research Congress (Wednesday, 22 July - Friday, 24 July)**

## **Post Hurricane Harvey: Teaching Compassion and Empathy in Undergraduate Nursing Education**

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### **Purpose:**

Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 storm, made landfall on August 2017, the largest storm to strike the United States in over a decade. The costliest and wettest tropical hurricane on record, it inflicted nearly \$200 billion in damage, primarily from widespread flooding in southeast Texas (Eberhard, 2017). In Rockport/Fulton, a coastal community where Harvey made landfall, thousands of homes were severely damaged along with the town's infrastructure. Damage to health care infrastructure created/exacerbated existing health disparities among the residents of Rockport/Fulton, which includes diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease (Frazee, 2018).

Nursing schools often struggle to instill in undergraduate nursing education the concept of inequity and how it informs nursing practice. Introducing inequity on a PowerPoint slide and experiencing it in reality are two different issues. This is even more of a challenge for students when discussing how current inequities create undue burden for vulnerable populations following a natural disaster.

### **Methods:**

The undergraduate theory and clinical Population Focused Health course at UT Health San Antonio, School of Nursing (UTHSA SON) is positioned in the final semester of the traditional and accelerated undergraduate curriculum. The content is structured around social justice, social determinants of health, experiential learning, and health equity at the population level. Didactic content is delivered in face-to-face and online formats with clinical assignments designed to provide experiential learning of didactic content. For instance, regular assignments include a poverty simulation highlighting the struggles of living in poverty; a public transportation day highlighting the challenges presented to people who depend on public transportation, and touring a homeless shelter highlighting the issues that lead to homelessness.

The UTHSA SON received funding to provide health care support during Harvey recovery (Sansom, 2017). The undergraduate Population Health faculty immediately revised their course schedule to allow for on-ground disaster relief with the goal to focus on the importance of equity, compassion and empathy following a natural disaster. The students were involved in a variety of experiences such as: assessment; screening; administering Hepatitis A, tetanus and flu vaccines; and working nurse practitioners to provide basic care services. Students also had an opportunity to canvas the neighborhoods, going door-to-door to ensure that residents were well and that no cost health care was available if needed.

### **Results:**

One of the clinical assignments required is student reflections. Their final reflection focuses on their most valuable experience during the semester and how they foresee that it will impact their nursing practice. This presentation will describe their reflections

about providing care to the community of Rockport/Fulton. The reading, analyzing and inductive interpretive process of the reflections produced three themes: 1) understanding consequences of natural disasters; 2) importance of advocacy and giving “voice” to nursing practice and 3) recognizing foundational structures of inequities.

**Conclusion:**

Most importantly, the students shared how important both compassion and empathy were to their nursing practice.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Hurricane Harvey, inequities and nursing students

**Abstract Summary:**

Hurricane Harvey made landfall on August 2017, the largest storm to strike the US in a decade. In Rockport, TX damage to health care infrastructure created/exacerbated existing health disparities among the residents. We received funding to provide health care during recovery. This presentation will describe their reflections about providing care.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Cantu has been a public health nurse for over 35 years and has extensive experience in the development of health promotion and prevention serving vulnerable populations. In her teaching role, she is committed to providing nursing students with the knowledge of the social determinants of health and their relevance to practice.