Does A Study Abroad Program Encourage healthcare professionals to Embrace Cross Cultural Experiences?

Dr. Abigail Mitchell DHEd, MSN, RN, CNE, FHERDSA
Dr. Connie Jozwiak-Shields PhD, ANP-BC, RN

Abstract

Today's generation of students has challenged nursing faculty to develop creative strategies and innovative methods to encourage students to experience study abroad. High School and College students in the United States have studied abroad for decades, however healthcare professionals are often left out of these experiences due to the curriculum design and required clinical hours. Nursing education plays a large role in preparing students for their competent cultural care. Madeleine Leininger is considered the founder of the theory of transcultural nursing or as known as culture of care theory. Culture is learned by each generation through both formal and informal experiences (Leininger, 1991). One of the primary aims of study abroad programs is to enable student and others to develop cultural sensitivity so they may practice appropriately for an increasingly multicultural patient population in their own countries (Karna Martins de Oliveira & Tuohy, 2015).

Methods

The purpose of this study is a twofold. First the researchers will perform a systematic literature review and secondly a quantitative study will be completed. This will be accomplished by study abroad healthcare professionals completing a 15 question survey based on their experiences. The goal of this experience is professional growth with the incorporation of new knowledge into their own practice, enabling them to be more culturally aware and thus provide culturally competent care (Smith & Curry, 2011).

Study abroad history

The practice of studying abroad for professional development is not new and has been undertaken by scholars since medieval times, however it is a relatively new endeavor in nursing/healthcare profession's education. Research has shown that cultural knowledge in nursing is extremely important and the lack of it may cause deficits in practice as result and nurses many have ethnocentric and stereotyped attitudes towards patients (Papadopulos 2006, Takeno 2010). Globalization was first used by economists in 1981 and it refers to the development of increasingly integrated global economy, especially in trade, free flow of capital and the cheaper labor market. In nursing the globalization process has generated a need for cultural competences as nurses and healthcare professional as they are required to manage multicultural patients in practice.

Limitations

Small sample size
Pilot for spring break
Lack of advertising, promotion
Lack of knowledge by advisors and faculty
Faculty members had to organize and plan

Literature Matrix

Eight healthcare professionals: students and alumni. The age of HCP ranged from 18-62, and had 0-40 years of experience in healthcare. All participants have traveled outside of the U.S.; prior to this experience; which included Canada. We traveled to London, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France over a 10 day period. Students and faculty presented informational sessions at each breakfast which included; traditions, language, food, lifestyles, religion, and health behaviors for each city/country. After the experience HCPs’ stated: It was interesting how politics matter, how food is so different from each region, and how health care is provided and why taxes are so high in each country related to “free” healthcare and often free higher education, and all the variety of languages in the same country. All 8 participants stated that cultural competence is learned and essential to improve patient outcomes.

Implications to Practice

Nursing programs must embrace and promote study abroad programs that will allow students to experiences cultures and reflect on their own practices. Study abroad programs are a useful strategy for developing cultural sensitivity and developing life-long learning skills.