

# Collaboration with Special Olympics Graduate Nursing Program Successful Clinical Experience



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**Purpose:** Obtaining health care for those in vulnerable populations coupled with multiple comorbidities can be difficult. Vulnerable populations include those patients with developmental and physiological impairments, such as Down Syndrome. Caregivers and family can be challenged by insurance coverage, transportation, advanced age and life constraints when obtaining care. As more nurses return to school for further education and positions as advanced practice nurses, particularly nurse practitioners, the need to obtain clinical preceptorships have become increasingly competitive. This competition leads to a decrease in available positions for adequate clinical placement. Providing quality care to vulnerable groups (i.e. Special Olympians) in a setting that is comfortable for the patient was identified by our graduate nursing program. The aim at educating and preparing graduate students who would be successful with varied experience had become paramount in the journey of Resurrection University's students.

Collaborating and developing clinical partnerships with vulnerable groups has become a success for both the university and its target population. University educators embarked on a journey travelling to secondary schools to provide physical exams to groups in great need. Two doctorally-prepared nurse practitioner-led clinical groups were started that provided students the opportunity to learn a variety of skills that prior clinical sites often lacked. Physical exams were performed on patients with special needs assisting them in competing in their desired extracurricular activities.

**Results:** Practitioners recognized the rare opportunities students would have to experience care focusing on patients affected by Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and those who were otherwise developmentally challenged. Educating caregivers and patients on the importance of exercise and proper nutrition led to further enrichment and understanding of risks associated with obesity. Partnering with Special Olympics, our graduate nursing program broadened the clinical residency experience of nurse practitioner students.

**Conclusion:** Clinical educators should capitalize on diverse learning experiences to provide a more unique learning experience for their graduate student population.