Study Abroad Program with Dynamics of Collaborative Research: A Case of Two Universities---Sylvia Mupepi PhD, Nancy Ebu PhD, Patience Doe MPH, Nancy Schoofs PhD

Background
The collaborative initiative of the community health nursing clinicals of Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Grand Rapids, Michigan with the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Cape Coast, Ghana began in 2008 when one GVSU pre-nursing student spent a semester in Africa. A GVSU faculty member kept in close contact with this student and required her American students to communicate regularly online. This contact facilitated reciprocation of faculty exchange where two UCC faculty members visited GVSU and three GVSU faculty members visited Ghana viewing the physical campus, meeting with UCC nursing professors, visiting clinical sites, and laying the groundwork for a partnership. An agreement of program activities was reached in 2012.

The First Trip
In 2013, the first GVSU students spent two weeks at UCC over their spring break and the week afterwards. These were all undergraduate students from the GVSU traditional and second degree BSN programs. These students and the two faculty members learned about healthcare delivery and categories of healthcare providers in Ghana and similarities and differences in nursing programs (UCC and GVSU). They explored the roles played by organizations such as SNA and how they might interact with our program making it possible to work side by side. This work was facilitated by our partners in Ghana, the second and third authors. They learned about health promotion across the lifespan and how community leaders take responsibility for health screening/physicals.

Continuing On
The lead author has continued the relationship between the two schools by completing a one-year Fulbright Scholarship at UCC in 2013-14 helping to develop their MSN program and continuing to train host country onsite faculty. These onsite faculty preceptors are required to have >3 years’ experience and licensure. The lead author returns to UCC each summer to work with graduate students and maintain the relationship with UCC nursing faculty, partners, and community workers. This has contributed greatly to the success of the GVSU nursing Study Abroad program. The strength of the partnership is highlighted by combined activities in which the students run a health fair which includes screening for high BP, diabetes, obesity, vision, and prenatal problems.

Paired GVSU/UCC students make home visits to give immunizations, do prenatal screening, and other adult assessments. The four authors and other colleagues from both colleges continue to evaluate and update the program.

The Future
It has now been six years of an ongoing partnership between GVSU and UCC. Along the way, students from the GVSU RN-BSN and DNP programs have also been added to the mix of students going to UCC. Each year the process of GVSU training and organization improves. With USAID support, we are able to partner together to survey the health of the people in villages and do collaborative research on cervical cancer. The next endeavor involves UCC students coming to GVSU. This discussion is in progress.

Nursing Implications
GVSU students see the implications of tropical diseases such as malaria, leprosy, and tuberculosis while following WHO guidelines for implementing primary health care. This helps them compare healthcare systems between the US and Ghana. The students achieve their community health clinical objectives and see how optimum health is achieved with minimal resources.

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