

## Sigma Theta Tau International's 29th International Nursing Research Congress

### The Role of Nurses in International and Community Development Programs: My Personal Experience

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#### **Introduction**

In recent years, I have been interested in the broader and higher-level context in which health services operate, including national and international policies, and sought opportunities to make a difference to larger population groups. Thus, I was overjoyed when in April 2016, whilst undertaking the Masters of International and Community Development (dual specialisation), I had the opportunity to be chosen for a 13-week work internship at the World Health Organisation (WHO) Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) and Country Office in the Philippines.

Working under the Division of Health Systems (DHS), my responsibilities were to provide technical support towards the strengthening of the organisation's health information systems, to engage with various stakeholders to better understand local health practices and to support initiatives designed to reduce maternal and newborn deaths through improving access, utilisation and delivery of quality care.

#### **Professional practice /Experiences**

For 13 weeks, I had the opportunity to learn and work with Dr. Jun Gao, Regional Team Leader of Health Intelligence and Innovation Unit, who offered guidance and direction as one of my responsibilities was to update the Country Health Information Profiles (CHIPS) for the Philippines using the Health Information and Intelligence Platform (HIIP). The HIIP is a platform which provides extensive health information, including country health statues and national health data, in an accessible, online and user-friendly format. Utilised by the WHO WPRO, it is a collaborative endeavour which enables policymakers, health industry experts, academic researchers and the public to assess, compare and analyse collective regional and global health indicators, as contained within WHO databases. The experience of updating the health information of the country Philippines provided me with a first-hand experience and appreciation of the importance of national registries, the numerous factors that impact a mature and reliable data collection system, and the intricacies of establishing an inclusive and accurate set of indicators for both local and international tiers of government.

Furthermore, to support the Philippines in achieving their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of reducing maternal and newborn deaths through improving the access and utilisation of quality maternal and newborn health services among the most disadvantaged and impoverished rural families in the Davao region, the WHO Country Office Philippines, in cooperation with Department of Health Philippines and funding support from the Republic of Korea, established a sub-national initiative entitled, ACCESS for MNH – Accelerating Convergence Efforts through Systems Strengthening for Maternal and Newborn Health. Working alongside the supportive Dr. Benjamin Lane, Team Leader of the Country Office Philippines Health Systems Strengthening and Recovery Unit, this opportunity cemented my passion in utilising my nursing skills, knowledge and experience in settings outside the traditional hospital surroundings. Through this project, I gained a comprehensive understanding of how health systems thinking theories are translated into practical international and community development programs and the various ways open to our profession to lead, participate and collaborate with key stakeholders to achieve improvements in the health and wellbeing of specific population groups.

Given my background knowledge of the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Australian Modification (ICD-10-AM), I assisted in the monitoring and presentation of data and trends,

particularly on the causes of maternity and infant mortality and morbidity. I also facilitated in the training and education of community health leaders to promote positive health seeking behaviours within village communities. I also played a role in ensuring that deliverables were on track, on time and within the allocated resources through the use of good project management skills across numerous programs and activities. In taking part, not only has this project given me an appreciation for the integral role nurses play in the promotion of healthcare practices, but also a realisation of the challenges involved in raising awareness and influencing behavioural change in individuals and communities in light of the effects and impacts of political, economic and environmental factors to personal preferences, cultural beliefs and health practices. As such, this experience has refined my capacity to critically communicate and engage with stakeholders especially in my collaboration with national and local government officials, healthcare providers and various non-government agencies. Lastly, this opportunity has developed my understanding and practice of viewing complex health issues, including the integration of primary care initiatives in the local, national and international context, using a broader social, economic and political perspective to recognise which factors drive a good health system.

**Conclusion:** As a nurse, the opportunity to learn and work at the WHO was a personally and professionally enriching and fulfilling experience as there were multiple instances where I was exposed to, and participated in, the various roles nurses play at the local, national and international tiers of healthcare provision. Ultimately, the total aggregate of these moments inspired me with regards to the ways nurses can contribute to the development of communities outside the walls of traditional hospitals in local and international forums.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

health information, international and community development and personal learning experience

**References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

With first-hand experience of the productive and collaborative work between local, national and international support programs on health services, Suzette Dela Cruz-Regalo shares her personal and professional learnings, and an insight on the contributions nurses can make outside traditional hospital settings, from her internship with the World Health Organisation.

### **Content Outline:**

Introduction

- Myself
- My current work
- My professional journey since graduating from university

The World Health Organization and the internship programme

- WHO
- Western Pacific Regional Office and member states
- WHO Health Systems Framework
- Internship programs and activities

Lessons learned – professional and personal

Conclusion - the different roles that nurses can play at international and community development programs

(May include a short video at the end)

First Primary Presenting Author

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**Author Summary:** Suzette Dela Cruz-Regalo works a Senior Policy Adviser at the Department of Health and Human Services in Victoria. She completed her Masters of Health Information Management at La Trobe University in 2014 and Post Graduate Diploma in International Development and Community Development (Dual Specialisation) at Deakin University in 2017. She is passionate about clinical nursing, community development, data analytics and women's health including the health and well-being of all mothers and babies.