



Immersion Project in Immokalee Florida: RN-BSN Students as Change Makers Improving the Health and Well-being of Migrant Workers and Their Families

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Abstract

Background: Access to health care is a challenge for migrant workers due to lack of resources and affordability; resulting in high incidence of communicable diseases, chronic illnesses, infant mortality, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses. Etienne, Messmer, Danis and Blot [1] reported on RN-BSN students providing education, prevention and caring for Haitians working in the sugar cane fields (Bateyes) in Dominican Republic.

Purpose: The purpose of the immersion project in Immokalee, Florida was to serve and educate migrant workers and their families in dire need of health care. The main focus was on health promotion and lifestyle changes (empowering people to take charge of their own health).

Methods: This descriptive study was based on Gallant (2012) "Nursing Analysis: The Effects on Student Learning" in Munhall [2] Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective. One-to-one face interviews were conducted on 45 RN-BSN nursing students participating in two immersion projects in Immokalee, Florida.

Results: Forty-five RN-BSN Students participated in two different five-day immersion projects October 23-29, 2018 and October 25-29, 2019. The students provided health screening and educational programs in three churches, at boys and girls club and center for girls for 960 Migrant workers, children and families for the 1st Immersion. For the 2nd immersion project students served 820 migrant workers, children and families. Of Interviews conducted on the 45 RN-BSN students in both immersions and transcribed, 30 were selected for content analysis.

Conclusion: This life-changing humanitarian medical mission served this underserved vulnerable population, providing health care access and education. RN-BSN students improved their ability to provide culturally competent care, anticipating needs of migrant workers in a medically underserved health care settings in Immokalee, Florida. Health education have a positive impact on the community.

Background

Nurses need to become aware of events in the world collaborating

with others to identify dangers that may occur in the communities they serve [3]. In a globalized world, local problems are complex and exceeding interconnected. Access to health care is difficult and challenging for migrant workers and their families due to lack of resources and affordability. This vulnerability results in high incidence of communicable diseases, chronic illnesses, infant mortality, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses. Nurse leaders have a long tradition of engaging in global partnerships in both academic service learning [4]. Etienne, Messmer, Danis and Blot [1] reported on RN-BSN students providing education, prevention and caring for Haitians working in the sugar cane fields (Bateyes) in Dominican Republic. There is limited documentation for the success of these relationships, with very few studied formally [5, 6].

Purpose

The goal of this service-learning experience was to concurrently provide health screening and health education to a rural medically underserved community and to develop and/or enhance cultural competence of RN-BSN students in assessing, providing health care, and education [7, 8]. The purpose of the immersion in Immokalee, Florida to serve and educate migrant workers and their families in dire need of health care. The main focus was on health promotion and lifestyle changes (empowering people to take charge of their own health). It is a goal of the School of Nursing to enhance the interdisciplinary experiences of students through participation in civic engagement and active involvement in global education. This collaborative inter-professional effort for the Immersion project occurred between the Benjamin León School of Nursing and Health Sciences Dental Hygiene, Haitian American Professionals Coalition (HAPC), Haitian American Nurses Association of Florida, Inc. (HANA) and local churches in Immokalee, Florida. The college provided a big truck to transport the supplies collected from the faculty and students for the two-hour trip over 120 miles. Students paid for their transportation, housing and meals.

Methods

This descriptive study was based on Gallant (2012) "Nursing

Analysis: The Effects on Student Learning” in [2] Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective. One-to-one face interviews were conducted on 45 RN-BSN nursing students participating in two immersion projects in Immokalee, Florida. The nursing students provided health screenings (blood pressure, body mass index, cholesterol, and blood glucose). Students focused on age appropriate prevention and education on HIV/AIDS, obesity, human trafficking, teen violence, domestic violence awareness, alcohol use disorder, bullying, backpack safety, breast, testicular and colorectal cancer, physical activity/exercise, smoking cessation, nutrition, oral health/hygiene. Students cared for pediatric patients, women, and families in a rural underserved population in Immokalee, Florida in a culturally competent manner.

Results

This immersion experience exposed students to selected World Health Organization and Healthy People 2020 and 2030 global goals, Millennium Goals, allowing these students to address some of them. The dates for the immersion project to Immokalee, Florida occurred October 23-29, 2018 and October 25-29, 2019. Both Community Health Nursing Practicum and Advanced Concepts Practicum Students participated in the immersion projects with Dental Hygiene, Physician Assistant and other Health Sciences students, demonstrating knowledge of diverse cultures, including global and historical perspectives. Students participated in a Forum on Civic Responsibilities, Changemaker Seminar whereby topics included such as societal needs and their responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society. Students conducted a community needs assessment of Immokalee, Florida and other identified needs of the community/population. For the first immersion project, the students served, providing educational programs in three churches and two other sites for 960 Migrant workers and their families.

1st site Maranatha Baptist church-109 people,

2nd Iglesias de JesuCristo church -59 people,

3rd Beraka Haitian Baptist church-107

4th site Boys, Girls club-650 children,

5th site Pace Center for Girls 59 total 984.

For the second immersion project October 25-29, students served, providing educational programs in three churches and two other sites for 820 Migrant workers and their families.

Maranatha Baptist church 109.

Iglesias de JesuCristo Church-59.

Beraka Haitian Baptist Church- 107.

Boys and Girls Club- 650.

Pace Center for Girls- 59.

Of Interviews conducted on the 45 RN-BSN students in both immersions and transcribed, 30 were selected for content shown below. Interviews

#1 “Children are fragile and resilient at same time. It is blessing providing care to challenged populations with health disparities. Interacting with children, seeing happiness is contagious. Teaching about health was rewarding; this experience was rewarding yet humbling, making me appreciate things I have and don’t have”.

#2 “I realize basic screenings are necessary, vital to these individuals; interest and enthusiasm of students make me do it over again. If I have changed one person’s mind I may have saved a life, making a positive impact on someone. To be part of making a difference in families’ lives has driven me (RN) to do more and to be the best I can be in caring for others. These families live in hazardous environments and are uneducated on how to deal with issues including lice. In the nursing world, we are surrounded by caring and compassionate individuals who share the same drive to give and protect. The opportunity to work with colleagues on this Mission trip were amazing; I am beyond grateful to work side by side with them.”

#3 “The unit director boys & girls club carries that same heart for Immokalee by giving people a chance for a better future for not only themselves, but for families. I cannot wait to see what we will continue

to bring to people as individuals and nurses”. These shackles opened my eyes to see how even close the world is different; we as students have power and ability to help others. It was very humbling to see all these shackles; it was great to help and give back to the community.”

#4 “Children born from migrant workers came to USA with an ethic of hard work, showing resilience in overcoming obstacles. Immigrant families have similar strengths, likely to have support from extended family members and likely to have both parents. They have a tremendous desire for their children to be successful at school. Immigrant children/families struggle; some are dealing with past traumas or persecutions, fear of deportation; some have little education or no skills to find a job that support their families, allowing them to access health care. Many thoughts came to my mind approaching Immokalee. Will activities planned have positive impact in their lives? Is this something that can enrich my life and my nursing profession?”

#5 “The immersion trip was a life awakening experience to help communities by promoting healthy lifestyles, achieving healthy behaviors through education with backpack safety. Benefits of Physical Activity were presented to school age children at Boys and Girls Club. This presentation educated this segment of the community regarding healthy lifestyles but was meant to increase self-esteem and motivate them to take care of their health. I can definitively confirm that it enriched my nursing profession as a culturally competent nurse and a community health nurse. I received satisfaction from the simplest smiles and laughs of the children enlightening me as a nurse with gift of helping others”.

#6 “Integrating education in our immersion trip was inspiring! Visiting schools, talking to community and understanding their needs was important to me”, what I appreciate about this trip was that we were able to provide much needed services with a great impact to a segment of the community that has no access to basic health care, providing health screenings and helping to identify diseases in their earliest stages.”

#7 “Providing education to teens gave me a sense of fulfillment; I was able to bring awareness to an important matter happening in our society. As mother of a teenager, I was speaking as a nurse and mother to draw attention to the topic on human trafficking, and domestic violence”. It was a rewarding experience serving these people. It motivated me to want to continue being a positive impact to the people in my community and around the world participating in medical mission trips”.

#8 “The most impactful time was spending time with children. Many families had multiple children with little means to support them. I was happy to play and care for children while parents received readings; they were grateful. Many children act as translators for parents because parents only speak their native language. Community nursing and education are very necessary since there is less access and resources.”

#9 “I was very fortunate to have opportunities, teaching young ladies about obesity and surprised to see how they were engaged, aware of on how obesity can affect lives. If immediate action is not taken, many will suffer from an array of serious health disorders. By teaching students to cultivate healthy habits early, schools can prevent obesity in later adulthood.”

#10 “I really enjoyed interacting with students at High School; they were very receptive and attentive about education provided. I received feedback with some sharing personal stories. Nurses are teachers.”

#11 “Taking blood sugars and educating young adults about the risk factors of diabetes was important. Lack of knowledge behind why eating healthy and maintaining healthy sugars was alarming. Those with diagnosed with diabetes do not take care of themselves due to lack of supplies, either needles, insulin, glucose strips, etc. is alarming. If unchecked they run risks of becoming very ill. Teaching kids

about human trafficking and health was rewarding. It was amazing to see how much they know. Many knew a lot of things at a small age! Their energy and participation made it just fun! Taking blood sugars and educating young adults/adults about risk factors of diabetes was important. Lack of knowledge behind why eating healthy and maintaining healthy sugars was alarming. Diabetics do not take care of themselves because lack of supplies, either needles, insulin, glucose strips, etc. is alarming. If unchecked these people run major risks of becoming very ill."

#12 "This medical mission trip allowed us to serve the community. These individuals are at higher risk for chronic diseases due to several factors: socio-economic status, lack of health insurance, geographical area, low level of education, genetic predisposition."

#13 "The overall experience was life changing; I felt we had travelled outside the US. I had never seen such a community like this one before, so many challenges to deal with. The amount of help this community received from our group was essential to meet their needs; the lesson they taught us was an eye-opening experience about the importance to get out and help others and be an active member of the community. I feel compelled to participate in these events in the future, and use my voice to positively impact others, especially those at communities at risk. I will never forget the friends I made and the time I spent."

#14 "Daily exercises include 1) Strength bones and muscles including the heart; 2) Increase level of endorphins, a natural hormone and increase level of happiness. 3) Decrease anxiety, blood pressure and chronic pain; 4) Maintain healthy body weight; 5) Increase energy levels; 6) Decrease risk for osteoporosis; 7) Relax and sleep well; dance and tone body. 8) Go outside with friends-walk, hike, bike ride or swim; 9) Take yoga class with friends, sharing healthy meal together; 10) Keep journal of workouts; take pictures of progress to boost motivation; 11) Run (or walk) in breast cancer awareness walks; 12) Stretch muscles before /after each session."

#15 "The health education outreach intervention took place at Boys/Girls Club providing handwashing and teeth brushing education. Nursing song rhymes were used to teach handwashing and teeth brushing. Kids practiced their skills using an alligator mouth". Educated youth will become educated adults. Health education has a positive impact on the community." **#15** "This medical mission trip allowed us to serve the members of the community of Immokalee, Fl. These individuals are at higher risk for chronic diseases due to several factors: socio-economic status, lack of health insurance, geographical area, low level of education, genetic pre-disposition, among others. The overall experience was life changing, as I felt we had traveled outside the US. I had never seen such a community like this one before, with so many challenges to deal with. The amount of help these community received from our group was essential to meet their needs; the lesson they taught us was an eye-opening experience about the importance to get out and help others and be an active member of the community."

#16 "The interest and enthusiasm shown by some students would make me do it all over again and again. If I educated and changed one person's mind, I may have saved a life and an impact on someone."

#17 "In the nurse world we are surrounded by caring and compassionate individuals that share the same drive to give and protect. The individuals I got the opportunity to work with on this Mission trip were nothing but that and I am beyond grateful to work side by side with them."

#18 "The unit director of this boys and girls club also carries that same heart for the people of Immokalee. He is giving the people a chance for a better future for not only themselves, but for their families. I cannot wait to see what we all will continue to bring to the people of the world as individuals and nurses."

#19 "One of the trailers that my classmate and I passed by giving out flyers, we noticed that the little girl had hair lice. We went to Walgreens

and purchased hair lice shampoo and took it to the mother the next day. The mother expressed her struggle with the hair lice and was beyond grateful we were able to help her. Prior to the hair lice shampoo I gifted her, she stated she was using detergent on her daughter's hair".

#20 "We took a photo to represent the education given to these ladies about the importance of breast cancer awareness. We handed out flyers with important information and gave prizes to those who gave us feedback about what they learned or engaged in the learning. No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted."

#21 "An image showed the perfect picture of one of the many children who were impacted by our visit to Immokalee, Florida. These under resourced children deserve proper care, food and attention to grow up healthy, happy and better their overall well-being. It was great to educate the young people of this community. Their knowledge on certain subjects left me in awe. It was a good feeling to know that they enjoyed learning about health and safety topics."

#22 "The Children of Immokalee, Florida are born from migrant farm workers who come to the United States with an ethic of hard work and show resilience in overcoming obstacles. Immigrant families have similar strengths, they are likely to have support from extended family members and are likely to have both parents. They have a tremendous desire for their children to be successful at school and in life. Immigrant children and their families struggle; some are dealing with past traumas or persecutions, fear of deportation, or some have little education or no skills to find a job that will support their families and allow them to access health care. The immersion trip was a life awakening experience with the goal to help the community by promoting healthy lifestyles and achieve healthy behaviors through education was achieved."

#23 "I presented on backpack safety and benefits of physical activity to school age children. This presentation not only educated this segment of the community regarding healthy lifestyles but was meant to increase self-esteem and motivate them to take care of their health. This trip enriched my nursing profession as a culturally competent nurse and as a community health nurse. The satisfaction that I received from the simplest smiles and laughs of the children of Immokalee enlightened me as a nurse with the gift of helping others".

#24 "What I appreciate the most about this trip, is that we were able to provide a great impact to a segment of the community that has no access to a basic care, by providing health screenings and helping to identify disease in its earliest stages".

#25 "Providing education to the teens at Pace Center for Girls gave me such a sense of fulfilment as I was able to bring awareness to a very important matter happening in our society. As the mother of a teenager, I was speaking not just as a nurse but as a mother to draw attention to the topic on human trafficking, and domestic violence prevention."

#26 "The most impactful time in Immokalee was spending time with all the children there. Many of the families there had multiple children with little means to support them. I was so happy to be able to play and care for these children while the parents received readings, needless to say they were so grateful. Many of these children act as the translators for their parents because the parents still only speak their native language."

#27 "Children are so fragile and yet so resilient at the same time. It is a blessing to be able to provide global care to challenged populations with health disparities."

#28 "Interacting with the children and seeing their happiness is very contagious. Teaching them about their health in the process is a rewarding benefit."

#29 "The health education outreach was to provide handwashing and teeth brushing education to boys and girls. Nursing rhymes were used to teach handwashing and teeth brushing. Kids were able to practice their skills using an alligator mouth."

#30 “This experience was rewarding yet humbling. It has made me appreciate the things I have and the things, I do not have. It made me realize how such basic screenings are necessary and vital to these individuals.”

Five major themes emerged from students' interviews: 1) poverty conditions; 2) poor health due to unhealthy lifestyle; 3) economic constraints; 4) vulnerable to violence and or abuse 5) fear of deportation.

Conclusion

Students participated in this immersion experience by caring for adults and children in a rural underserved population in a culturally competent manner and continued to save lives. This life-changing humanitarian medical mission served this underserved vulnerable population, providing health care access and education. As a result of this project, students improved their ability to provide culturally competent care and anticipate needs of migrant workers/patients in medically underserved health care settings in Immokalee, Florida. Long-term effects-educated youth will become educated adults. Health education had a positive impact on the community.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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