



William Ferreras (HCC) and Jaclyn Shedden (UT) during midwife demonstration.



Laura Foster (HCC) and Lisa Kurlle (Highline CC) taking vital signs in a rural community.

Beautiful Similarities Lead to Developing Cultural Awareness

Transcultural Nursing: Study of Healthcare in an International Setting, Ecuador 2008

"I might have left America expecting to find Ecuador as a place, when compared with America, there would be huge disparities that I would be unable to grasp. But I can truly say that I found beautiful similarities as well as differences that I found embraceable. People are the same when looking within the core, and that is what I have surmised from my Ecuadorian experience."

Forty nursing students from eight different colleges traveled to Ecuador in the summer 2008 to participate in a transcultural nursing course offered in two sessions. Through a variety of experiences both in the capital city of Quito and in the rural areas of the Amazon Basin, students gained an awareness and understanding of culture which therefore impacts nursing care.

Students arrived in Quito after traveling from all over the United States to settle in for a week of activities with the nursing faculty and students from the Central University of Ecuador. U.S. students learned that nursing care is very similar in Ecuador by observing nurses and nursing students, giving care in a variety of hospitals in Quito, and providing basic care to the elderly in a nursing home. As students reflected, the differences in nursing involved the lack of resources, recycling of resources, nurse/patient ratios, and differing views on privacy.

After a day of travel through the breathtaking Andes Mountains, the students arrived to spend a week at the Arizona State field school on the Napo River in the Amazon Basin. Students experienced the Quechua culture in unique ways. The local midwife involved the students in a demonstration of a natural home birth which was humorous and realistic. Shamanism was discussed and experienced by observing a Shaman ceremony. The numerous Amazonian plants which have medicinal and daily useful purposes were taught by the local people while hiking through the forest and planting yucca.

Students began to apply the knowledge learned about culture by working alongside the nurses of the ministry of health during brigades in remote communities. U.S. students took vital signs, height, weight, assisted the physician or dentist, and taught classes on basic hygiene and health.

Head lice is a common problem among the children and adults in the Napo region, so the students, with donated lice treatment, set up stations for shampooing, rinsing, and combing out nits. The local people were grateful to have the hair free of lice.

When students returned home, they were required to submit a reflections paper and excerpts from their journals. Their words are powerful summations and examples of their learning.

"I thought this was one of the best experiences of my life. I learned so much about myself and our world. By tying together a belief system, an educational system, and one country's practice of medicine, I believe I was able to get a close-up look at Ecuador and its people."

"I learned a lot about nursing in a different country, but the main thing I took away from this trip is the realization that underneath all the differences in cultures and belief systems, human beings are essentially the same: we suffer, we hurt, we care, we love, we laugh, we cry, we heal. I didn't need to speak the language to see the obvious pride and care the nurses took in their jobs; it made me proud to be part of this beautiful and honorable profession. The two weeks in Ecuador inspired me to not only become a better nurse, but to try to be a better person."



JoEllen Irizarry taking baby's temperature.



Christa Cononlogue (UT) and Nicki Harris (HCC) rinsing hair after lice treatment.



Marilyn Green (HCC) teaching child with orthopedic disabilities.