guest editorial

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Global Health Nursing: Making Connections by Embracing the Other

A woman who recently returned from Brazil comes to the outpatient clinic with a high fever. A man arrives at the emergency department from an African country experiencing a contagious, deadly disease. A child recently arrived in the United States from a refugee camp in Thailand comes to the school nurse’s office with a cough. A team of nurses, surgeons, and technicians from the hospital are leaving for a Central American country to perform eye surgery in a rural area. Each of these situations requires current knowledge of global health issues for the nurse to provide culturally tailored and safe care.

Nursing is about using knowledge and skills to improve the health of individuals, families, and communities. Within the field of global health, this means nurse educators must know about and prepare nurses to effectively respond to situations like those mentioned above. Organizations leading in the development of knowledge about global health include the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (n.d.) and the World Health Organization (http://www.who.int/en/). Through these organizations, nurses engage in disease and injury surveillance, research, program development, and service delivery.

Making connections to health issues in the global commons enriches nurses’ lives. It is through these connections with others who are different from us that nurses expand their worldview by moving from a culturally ego-centric position in which we believe our life views and values are right and best, to “embracing the other” (Volf, 2010, p. 65) who may have different views and values he believes are right and best for her or him. This does not diminish us or elevate “the other,” it simply allows space to appreciate the other for who he or she is.

Nurse educators must lead the way in making connections that embrace the other by allowing ourselves and our learners to know, appreciate, and honor the traditions and practices of others. This leadership can take the form of developing learning experiences that frame U.S. health issues within the broader global health community, so that our learners develop a more cosmopolitan view of health care beyond the local setting or embracing the global health community within the local community. In addition, many U.S. nursing schools and health care systems have institutional mission statements that support global health awareness and engagement. They support making connections by offering study abroad programs or service trips. These experiences engage nurses and future nurses in visiting communities outside the United States. The benefits of internationally-based experiences include gaining global perspectives, becoming more culturally sensitive, and developing in-depth knowledge of how another country’s health care systems function. For these programs to be effective, nurse educators must ensure that programs are organized using best practices in global health volunteering to avoid harm through lack of language skills, providing outdated medicines, or allowing unskilled learners to perform work they would not do at home.

Making connections to the global health care community can enrich our lives as educators and learners. The real value of having a well-informed, culturally knowledgeable, and welcoming nursing workforce is that our patients are advantaged through culturally tailored nursing care that results when nurses extend themselves to embrace the other. (Volf, 2010)

This editorial serves to launch a series of Teaching Tips columns focused on global health nursing. We address four aspects, including describing the field of global health and

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global nursing and why it is imperative for nurses to increase global awareness for their own practice, presenting a model for systems thinking about global health, sharing practical strategies and tips for integrating global health into classroom and clinical practice, and lastly, providing guidance for how to lead and participate in service trips.

REFERENCES
