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### **Trans-cultural Nursing Experience**

The summer after my junior year of college I participated in a trans-cultural nursing study abroad program in the Philippines. It was a three-week course through Truman State University where I attended college. We left the end of May 2002 and began the 36 hour trip across the ocean. We landed in Manila, Philippines and began our once in a lifetime experience.

Our first clinical experience was in the obstetrical and nursery unit at the government hospital Jose R. Reyes Memorial Medical Center in Manila. The hospital offered services regardless of a patient's ability to pay. It was quite an eye opener when we arrived our first day. The first thing was the overwhelming heat in the hospital. It was the first of June and very hot and humid. There was no air conditioning in most of the hospital! The smell on the Obstetrics floor was also overwhelming. After delivery they put the placentas in a big deep freezer, which was not working properly. The nurse to patient ratio was 1:30. I remember walking into the "delivery room" and seeing five women lined up on hospital beds. They were unclothed except a thin sheet covering them. They were not allowed to have family attend the birth. There were medical residents by each bed tending to the birth. The women did not make a peep during their delivery. After the baby was born, the baby was whisked off by a nurse who clamped the cord, weighed and measured baby, gave the Vitamin K injection and gave the first bath. The baby was then put under heat lamps in the nursery. There were often not enough cribs for each baby so you might see 2-3 babies in one crib. Sometimes there were two moms on one hospital bed as well. After mom had "recovered" from the birth, the baby was brought to her. We were actually able to deliver a baby! It was quite an experience-one that I will never forget. These women all gave birth with no pain medicine and did not make a sound.

While in the hospital we observed many things that were done quite differently. They had to make due with the limited supplies. They rolled their own cotton balls from a huge ball of cotton and cut smaller pieces of gauze from a big roll. They also washed their gloves after using them and hung them to dry on a rack. They would then place them in brown paper and then take them to be autoclaved. They were now "sterile" again. They thought we were so wasteful to be throwing our gloves away after we used them.

While in Iloilo City, we completed our clinical on the pediatric and medical surgical floor of a hospital. There was no bedding on the beds, not even a mattress. Families provided all the bedding and the bedside care for the patients. One of the pediatric clients was in isolation, which was accomplished by placing a curtain around her bed. On the medical surgical floor, men were lined up in beds on side of a big room and women were on the other side. The patients had no privacy.

We also assisted at a social hygiene clinic, which serves the commercial sex workers. Prostitution is legal in the Philippines as long as they have their “pink card”. The workers have to be tested weekly and if they are positive for gonorrhea their “pink card” is taken away until they complete their dose of antibiotics. Once they have completed the antibiotics they receive their “pink card” back. One of the ladies I spoke with said she had to work as a sex worker because they did not have enough money to raise their children. She was married and had three children. She was not proud of what she did, but stated that was the only way she could support her family. The workers were supposed to be at least 18 years of age but many looked much younger.

While in Iloilo City, we went on a home visit in a regional barangay (local neighborhood). The houses were very small and had dirt floors. A few of the homes had electricity but it was considered a luxury if you did. There were dogs, cats, and chickens running around the neighborhood. The families we visited were so friendly and accommodated us in any way they could.

Overall this experience impacted my life in a huge way. The trip really opened my eyes to nursing and all the luxuries we have in the United States. It was an awesome learning experience to be able to experience a culture different from my own. It was a once in a lifetime experience and I am glad that I was able to participate in it.

