

Teaching nursing student's cultural sensitivity and compassion for the underserved: The success of a transformational service learning course to Uganda

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Cultural sensitivity and compassion for the underserved are essential skills for nurses. One strategy for transforming the hearts and minds of nursing students was through a rigorous academic service-learning course to a third world country. This 14-day immersion trip allowed students and faculty from diverse disciplines to symbiotically connect through an intellectual, spiritually driven experience. Students gained an appreciation for the rich human spirit that was infectious among the Ugandan people. They felt a true sense of belonging when engaging in all activities such as building a house for a pygmy family, providing nursing care and compassion for the infirmed, or simply playing with a group of handicapped orphans. Every experience planned was designed to take students out of their comfort zone, to create dissonance, and make them reflect on their own values as well as the needs of others. The lessons learned from this experience, as recounted by one of the nursing students, was not only from the heartbreaking scenes that we saw in the hospitals, but instead the joy of the Ugandan people intertwined with the sadness of their impoverished situation that was most enduring.

Biography

Catherine P. Lovecchio is an Assistant Nursing Professor at the University of Scranton in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She has conducted transformational service learning trips to Appalachia, Los Angeles and Uganda. She coordinates the Nursing Service Trips for the Nursing Department. Catherine teaches medical-surgical nursing, advanced clinical concepts and leadership and management for senior level nursing students. Her research interests are in the area of transformational learning experiences for students in the clinical setting and through service trips.

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