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Minnesota Nursing Magazine

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Anna Terry Shares her Peace Corps Experience

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You are a former Peace Corp member. What is different about this experience (grounded in nursing research) versus your Peace Corp experiences?

In the Peace Corps you have two years to grow relationships and create a project that is derived by community members to address problems identified by the community. This experience was very different because I had to rely on relationships the NGO, Hombro a Hombro (HAH) and other volunteers had established with the community. Thankfully, HAH has been working there for 20 years and has good working relationships with many communities in Intibuca. I went in with a very specific project, to understand more about the prevalence and management of hypertension. This need was illuminated from the work of past nursing brigades and its growing presence globally.

It was a research project, so certain protocol had to be followed: I needed to seek IRB approval, account for confidentiality and be very methodical about data collection and time management.

How has your nursing education (specifically the MN program) prepared you to lead this project?

My classes in research and public health provided the context and foundation for the tasks I needed to accomplish in Honduras. The “windshield survey” a technique used for community assessment we learned about in public health provided me with a new way of thinking about community with a health based perspective, identifying social determinants of health and how they played into the growing prevalence of hypertension.

As world health is shifting toward non-communicable disease, what impact do you hope this research will have on this community and the communities closer to home?

Chronic disease management is costly and difficult for health systems and patients alike. With this research, I hope to shed light on the growing presence of hypertension and prehypertension in areas where you might least expect it, like rural Honduras. If we can identify risk behaviors and promote healthy lifestyle changes sooner we can prevent new diagnoses of hypertension. Televisions and packaged food are available nearly everywhere now, if the world continues to adopt ‘western’ lifestyle habits they will also adopt our diseases.

Think about examples of the benefits on a human level - testimonials/comments from project participants.

I was impressed by the attention hypertension was given in the community, it was a well known ailment, the health promoters even performed a skit about HTN at a health fair I attended. In the interviews they were eager to share what they knew and how they cared for people with Hypertension.

What information/experience had the most impact on you?

As an outsider visiting areas like Esperanza it’s easy to romanticize their way of life, the geography is striking, distractions are few, the pace is easy...hardships seem minimal-because as an outsider you can leave. After spending days in the clinic I realized what important work this clinic was providing for many surrounding communities. People walked hours to get medical attention and if the problem was more serious than they could care for there, they had to find someone with a car and go three hours up and down winding mountain dirt roads to arrive at the nearest hospital. One night I sat with a woman laboring with her first child, after 3 long hours of pushing they decided they needed to send her to the hospital, so 10 cm dilated she got in a truck and had to make the journey to the hospital, this is when the hard reality of limitations in health care services set in for me. Luckily, she made it but I don’t think the same luck would be had by someone suffering from heart attack or stroke which is why attention is needed on hypertension management and prevention.