

Health@World, towards a culture sensitive nurse identity.

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As a future nurse it's important to identify your own place within a more global and evolving context both national and international. Within the international project Health@World, first year nurse students of Howest (University College West Flanders) learn about the importance of social and cultural influences on nursing, health and health care and open their minds to the diversity of our (globalizing) society. Through this experience based project, nurse students develop a nurse identity that is based upon national and international theoretical and practical experiences.

The project is organized as an international week and the nurse education of Howest invites international nurse students and lecturers to participate. With a three-topic content and an experience based approach, participants learn with and from each other.

Health (care) worldwide

Many factors combine together to affect the health of individuals. Whether people are healthy or not, is determined by their circumstances (health behavior, genetics, ...) and environment. To a large extent, factors on international (economic inequality north-south, financial crisis, ...), national (debts, economic measures, ...), community (environment, employment, ...) and family (income, housing, ...) level all have considerable impacts on health.

The different influencing factors mentioned above are presented to the first year students as a framework to be able to understand differences in health, health care and health behavior of different nationalities/cultures.

Nursing worldwide

Evidence based nursing is becoming common practice in health care settings. Still there's a lot of differences between the nursing practice in different countries worldwide and even in Europe.

Is nursing practice also cultural determined?

Both students and lecturers who're participating in international exchange are reporting a lot of differences in nursing procedures, materials and practice between countries. Even within a country, nursing practice can already differ between health care settings (fex. hospital versus home care).

An important cause of these differences is definitely the environmental reality in which nursing is practiced, but maybe also different evidence and therefore different nursing education. Maybe we can even speak about a different 'nursing culture'.

Culture sensitive care

In a relatively short time, Flanders has become a multicultural and multi-religious society. On the one hand that's positive. A multicolored society has many advantages and can be very enriching. We are invited to deal with the richness of difference and meet the other. On the other this colorful life doesn't come without a struggle. Regularly there're frictions, conflicts and disagreements related to the ethno-cultural diversity.

This social trend is also reflected within the health care services. Also health care facilities are challenged to intercultural work. And also here this happens somewhere on the continuum between "very inspiring" and "especially difficult". The challenges in this field are wide and complex. More than ever there is a need for intercultural dialogue, to grasp and understand the actual intercultural processes and to find an appropriate attitude to deal with that.

Mr. Kurt Debaere is a registered nurse (University College South West-Flanders), postgraduate in tropical medicine (Institute for Tropical Medicine Antwerp) and Master of Science in health education and health promotion (University Ghent). At University Ghent he also graduated from the post academic course: initial teaching course higher education and e-learning in higher education at the Catholic University Leuven. Furthermore he is a certified quality coach for public services (Amelior).

From 1993 he was working as a nurse in several hospital wards and diagnostic services in hospitals in Belgium. Between 1995 and 1998 he was working in the Balkan and the Caucasus as a senior medical coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, preparing and supervising primary healthcare and community healthcare projects. Since 1999 he teaches health promotion, public health and social casework in the bachelor in nursing at the Howest University College West-Flanders.

As researcher he focusses on the study fields informal care support ('wrap care') and empowerment in home care at the University College West-Flanders and Flemish home care services.

He's the inspirer of 'Knowledge Point Informal Care', low trash-hold support initiatives for informal caregivers (families) of chronicle ill, elderly and handicapped people in homecare in the north of West-Flanders. These projects include supportive home visits and care holidays for informal carers', educational workshops for health professionals and students, development of research based solutions to support 'informal carers'.

As responsible for the international office in the nursing education at the University College West-Flanders, he facilitates international exchange and participates in different international organizations and projects in Europe (European Federation of Nurse Educators, Nursing curricula in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cross Border Health Care, Evidence Based Practice) and south initiatives in Africa (prevention and treatment of esophagus burns in children in Guiney and Gambia), Central America (introducing provider-patient communication as a new topic for training and research at health institutes in Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador) and Asia (solidarity activities with Medicine for the third world in the Philippines).

He organizes each year (end of April) an international week on culture sensitive care.

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