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An Interdisciplinary Approach to Elder Care in Nicaragua

Description

An interdisciplinary team of students and faculty from Pacific University traveled to Nicaragua to work with underserved elders living in a group home. The trip extended from late December 2007 through early January 2008.

Disciplines

Dental Public Health and Education | Occupational Therapy | Physical Therapy

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Elder Care in Nicaragua

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Introduction

An interdisciplinary team of students and faculty from Pacific University traveled to Nicaragua to work with underserved elders living in a group home. The trip extended from late December 2007 through early January 2008.

Purposes

- Create a sustainable improvement in the well being of underserved elders living in a group home environment
- Provide an interdisciplinary opportunity for health professions students and faculty to work together to provide health services
- Develop an appreciation for the role of other health professions in providing comprehensive patient care and referrals
- Enhance understanding of issues related to elder care, culture and poverty



Jessie F. Richardson Foundation

The Jessie F. Richardson Foundation Foundation is a charitable not-for-profit organization located in Portland, Oregon. They are committed to enhancing the efficacy and impact of the world's response to the global aging crisis. They support programs to improve living conditions for indigent elders in the U.S. and in developing countries. The JFR Foundation supported this project by:

- Establishing contacts within Nicaragua
- Making travel arrangements including air, ground, hotel and meals
- Coordinating fundraising and solicitation of medical supplies
- Arranging for translation services
- Assisting with supervision



Our Team

Our interdisciplinary team included one faculty member and two students from dental health science, one faculty member and four students from occupational therapy and one faculty member from physical therapy.



“La Providencia” Hogar de Ancianos

- Hogares de Ancianos provide care for indigent elderly residents
- La Providencia is located in Granada and is one of 20 hogares in Nicaragua
- La Providencia is managed by the Sisters of Mercy
- At the time of our visit, La Providencia had 46 residents (24 males, 22 females) and 20 staff members including 9 caregivers
- Hogares are funded primarily through donations

Services Provided

Students and faculty worked together in interdisciplinary healthcare teams to:

- Assess activities of daily living (ADLs)
- Assess oral health status
- Educate patients and caregivers
- Collaborate with local healthcare providers for ongoing care
- Begin plans for building a rehabilitation center
- Make plans for future trips



Student Feedback

“After working closely with the other programs, I learned that patient assessments start as soon as the patient walks in the door. Patients are evaluated on daily activities such as opening the door, opening a toothpaste tube and moving in and out of a chair. I used to view these as basic everyday activities, but now realize that these are just a few assessments that occupational and physical therapy perform to evaluate patients and ultimately work with them to improve their quality of life.”

“Although I have the patient demonstrate their toothbrush technique to me in the dental chair, I realize it is just as important to evaluate their ability to reach the sink, turn the water on and open the toothpaste themselves.”

“I have built relationships and an understanding of other disciplines that will greatly contribute to my patient's oral health and their overall health and well being.”

Future Plans

- Conduct annual trips to Nicaragua to create sustainable service-learning programs, including extended off-site rotations
- Expand services provided to residents and provide services at additional locations
- Offer education and training programs for local healthcare providers
- Develop financial infrastructure to support student and faculty travel, as well as purchase of supplies
- Include additional healthcare disciplines in future trips, ie. pharmacy, physician assistant, optometry, etc.
- Create research opportunities for health professions students and faculty