

Reflective Essay

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Throughout my life, I have been fortunate enough to do a fair bit of travelling. I've travelled to the United States, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia. I guess you could say, I have always had the urge to explore more of the world around me. In my first semester of TRU's nursing program, I heard about the field school opportunity in Nepal that took place at the end of year three. In May, I was fortunate enough to have made it to the field school. My trip to Nepal was a once in a lifetime experience. It has widened my perspective in so many different ways, such as further understanding the difference between health care systems of Canada and Nepal. As well as expanding my knowledge and skills related to nursing and getting the chance to immerse myself into their culture.

Prior to the field school experience, I thought about the social interactions I would have with the people there and how different it would be to the interactions I would have in Canada. Or if there was even a difference at all. I thought about how differently people might greet each other, as well as the clothes they would wear. I did not know what to expect from Nepal because it was not a country I had travelled to before and I did not really know many people from Nepal. All I really knew was what we had learned as a group during the information session we had prior to leaving. I had learned that Nepal culture is heavily influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions, which indicated that it was a more traditional country. Honestly, something I thought of a lot prior to arriving in Nepal was the clothes I was going to bring and wear. I think living in Canada my entire life, I have had the liberty to wear whatever I want. Therefore, dressing modestly was not always something I thought about. It was really important for me to ensure that the clothes I brought and wore were respectful of their culture and social norms, as I did not want to unintentionally disrespect anyone or bring unwanted attention to myself. Ultimately, I was extremely excited to experience something new that would help me learn and allow me to grow as a person.

Nepal is such a beautiful country that is rich in culture and it is evident through the temples you see and the attitudes of the people who live there. During my first day, I noticed that everyone seemed to be more relaxed when it comes to time and was something I noted to be different from Canada. As everyone in Canada seems to be in a hurry to be on time at all times. Personally, living in a new country for an entire month took some time to adjust, but the country itself did not give me complete culture shock because parts of it reminded me of the other countries I already travelled to. I enjoyed learning about the country's history and visiting historic sites because it gave me a better understanding of the country's past and how it has developed into the country it is today. One of my favourite parts of the trip was getting the chance to interact with the nurses on the unit and locals that we would meet. The nurses on all of the units referred to each other as "sister" and always showed so much respect for one another, it truly resembled a family. The dynamic on the floor was always welcoming and respectful and you can see how appreciative the patients are of the care they are receiving.

Some of the challenges I experienced while we were at the hospital were trying to communicate with the patients due to an obvious language barrier, this made it more difficult for

me to understand them and participate in their care. However, I took this as an opportunity to learn about different ways I can communicate their needs and is something I will also take with me into my nursing practice in Canada. One method is trying to use non-verbal communication to reflect their needs or explaining what I will be doing. Therefore, this can include using hand gestures and pointing to objects. Luckily, the nurses there were also able to help us with translations. Throughout my time in Nepal, I got to practice some skills with the guidance of the nurses and practice communication in situations where a language barrier is present.

What I learned from this experience was how interconnected Nepali culture is to health care and being able to see families actively get involved in their loved one's care to promote healing. This is where communication is a huge contributing factor to understanding someone's needs and the best way I can offer support as a nurse. This is a skill that I can apply to my future practice as a nurse because it will help me strengthen my relationships with the people I work with, but it can also help promote quality patient care. For example, I was able to discuss with the family about the patient's condition and relay information back to the primary nurse about the family's concerns and collaboratively come up with a solution that addresses their needs. This experience has helped me recognize that I am fortunate to live in a country where the citizens do not normally worry about the cost of health care services because having affordable health care is not often attainable for many people in other countries around the world. I was able to observe at first hand how challenging it can be to provide quality care when essential resources are low and there is a barrier to accessibility, one of those barriers include cost of supplies. This is something that was important for me to be aware of because everyone's circumstances are different. As I get closer to becoming a nurse, I hope that I continue to apply the core values of nursing and recognize that everyone is uniquely different and what may work for one person may not work for the next. This experience will impact my future practice as a nurse by ensuring that I always provide culturally safe care and continue to prioritize the patient's needs, actively listen to their wishes, and encourage them to get involved in their care.

Now that I have returned back to Canada, I often find myself reflecting on the experience I had in Nepal and applying the things that I've learned on that trip to different aspects of my life. I am appreciative and beyond grateful for the opportunity to partake in a once in a lifetime opportunity, as it has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of what healthcare can look like in different parts of the world. As I prepare to step into the healthcare field as a registered nurse, the opportunity to interact with a diverse population is endless.