

# THE CONCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A MISSION NURSING CLASS

**T**he mission nursing course at Southern Adventist University is now in its fifth year. Conceived more than 20 years ago, this course matured slowly, finally developing into its present form.

## A Vision Is Born

As a teenager, I often accompanied my father on his missionary treks into the primitive mountain villages of Taiwan. The remote aborigine peoples had no organized schools or health care, and their treatments featured tribal customs and herbal remedies. As I saw the deplorable living conditions, the chronically sick children, and the

obvious lack of education, I developed a keen desire to become a missionary nurse someday. This vision led me to obtain the education to make my dreams come true.

Ten years later, after I had survived the rigors of a Master's degree and teaching first-year nursing students in the United States, an opportunity came for our family to go to the not-at-all-primitive island of Hong Kong, where I found little opportunity to practice my childhood dream of being a "missionary nurse." Our two Seventh-day Adventist hospitals were well staffed with nurses being trained in

our school of nursing. I taught a few nursing classes and assisted with some clinical supervision in the hospital. Deep within my heart, however, remained a longing to get out among the people who had no access to organized health care.

Our next overseas assignment was at Mountain View College in the southern Philippines. Secluded in the highlands of Mindanao, the college was surrounded by numerous small villages in great need of health education and basic health care. During the two years we were there, I had the

privilege of organizing the freshmen nursing students into small groups and inviting the campus physician and dentist to join us in holding health-education classes and treating major health problems in the surrounding villages. During these clinics, another dream began to form in my mind—of someday creating a course for senior nursing students that would spark an interest in health care among underprivileged peoples in developing countries.

Picture  
Removed

**During their spring mission trip, three of the author's nursing students, Heather Charlton, Lynette Oh, and Harmony Kubik, administered anti-parasite medication to a group of school children in a jungle village in Nicaragua.**

BY LAURA CURRIE NYIRADY

**The Vision Takes Form**  
That dream lay dor-

mant for a number of years. By then, I was teaching at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. Tentatively, I began to research the idea of a mission nursing class. I sought information from individuals at Weimar Institute, administrators from Adventist Frontier Missions, current and returned missionaries who had worked among primitive people groups, and the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference mission coordinator, Tony Torres. Trained as a physician in the Dominican Republic, Torres had taken many short-term mission teams to provide health clinics. All of the persons contacted strongly encouraged me to set up a mission nursing class and offered to help in any way they could.

When I shared these ideas and tentative plans with a few mission-minded nursing students, their exuberance was contagious. They insisted that this class should be offered the next semester so they could take it before graduating. Within a few days, they had not only discussed the idea with the dean of the school of nursing, Dr. Katie Lamb, but had also returned to my office with a written petition containing the signatures of more than 30 classmates.

The possibilities were exciting. I asked God for guidance so that the class would not only teach concepts of health care in developing countries, but also touch and change lives and motivate students toward a life of service. The dean of nursing gave her enthusiastic support and suggested that I create a tentative course description and outline, including objectives and required textbooks. This outline was submitted to the School of Nursing Curriculum Committee, then to the Academic Affairs Committee, and finally to the Faculty Senate for a final vote of approval.

### The Course Takes Form

We were unable to find any similar course to serve as a model. We thus had to do some creative planning. Concepts and principles gleaned from the book *The Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White (1905) formed the foundation upon which the course description was based. White stated:

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. . . . We should ever remember that the object of medical missionary work is to point sin-sick men and women to the Man of Calvary, who taketh away the sin of the world. By beholding Him, they will be changed into His likeness” (pp. 143, 144).

She continued:

“Missionary nurses who care for the sick

## A dream began to form in my mind—of someday creating a course for senior nursing students that would spark an interest in health care among underprivileged peoples in developing countries.

and relieve the distress of the poor will find many opportunities to pray with them, to read to them from God’s word, and to speak of the Saviour. . . . Their unselfish love, manifested in acts of disinterested kindness, will make it easier for these suffering ones to believe in the love of Christ” (Ibid, pp. 144, 145).

Keeping these thoughts in mind and following the well-known adage that “prevention is better than cure” led to the following course description:

*This elective class is intended to introduce the nursing student to principles and practices of health care in developing and third-world countries. Throughout the course, emphasis will be placed on the role of the missionary nurse in spreading the Gospel while administering health care. Concepts of basic health*

Picture  
Removed

**Christy Weigley gets mission nursing experience as she records information on patients waiting to be seen at a Nicaraguan clinic.**

*education and prevention of diseases throughout the life cycle is a primary focus of the course. Utilization of natural remedies and available resources and materials will be promoted.*

Picture  
Removed

**The varied curriculum of the mission nursing class prepares students for the many responsibilities they will face during the spring mission trip. Above: Lynnette Oh scrubs a Nicaraguan child suffering from lice, scabies, and impetigo.**

Idea for content and textbooks came from numerous sources. Structuring the course objectives required resource persons. I interviewed missionaries from underdeveloped countries, consulted with the administrators from Adventist Frontier Missions and contacted medical missionary organizations, examined textbooks on tropical diseases and health care in developing countries, and networked with physicians, nurses, and pastors with mission experience. The original course objectives have been reviewed and revised every year since the course was first taught five years ago to reflect practical experience. In summary form, these objectives include

the following content areas:

1. Biblical perspectives on medical missionary work;
2. Cultural sensitivity, including the effects of religion and superstitions on health practices;
3. Principles of development, including such topics as disease prevention, health education, and sanitation;
4. Use of natural remedies;
5. Review of physical assessment for diagnosis and treatment of basic conditions seen in underdeveloped areas;

involves hands-on and small-group activities.

A major attraction is the optional spring-break mission trip. This 10-day adventure provides an opportunity for students and faculty to experience firsthand the concepts presented in class. Without exception, all who have gone on these mission trips have returned with a renewed sense of God's power and intimate presence in their lives. The students each have to raise more than \$900 to pay for their travel and expenses, as well as some extra funds to purchase needed supplies and medications.

Pictures Removed

**Christy Shank and Kate Estella, mission nursing class students, examine the abdomen of a boy with an enlarged liver caused by malaria.**

**Patients line up to be seen at one of the mobile clinic sites operated by students from the mission nursing class.**

6. Basic wound care, including snake and insect bites, and suturing of lacerations;
7. Maternal and child care, including nutrition, immunizations, obstetrical management, birth spacing methods, and uncomplicated deliveries;
8. Dental care and the basics of tooth extraction;
9. Prevention and treatment of major parasitic and infectious diseases;
10. Training local health-care workers; and
11. Setting up an outpost clinic.

Picture  
Removed

### **The Course Is Initiated**

The weekly three-hour classes have included guest presenters from as far away as Guyana. Some speakers drive 200 miles or more to share their experiences, and all have contributed tremendously to the overall learning experience.

To register for the mission nursing class, each student must be a senior in the A.S. nursing program or enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program. Each enrollee must have already completed a maternity class and basic medical/surgical nursing. This knowledge base is critical in order for students to be able to compare and contrast health care in different parts of the world.

### **Course Outcomes**

Why do so many students sign up for academic overloads in order to fit the mission nursing course into their class schedule? As an elective, this course does not count toward a specific degree. The class size is limited to 15 students, since much of the learning

**Rachel Hennlein and Delight Johnston, mission nursing class students, provide skin care to a patient with scleroderma.**

When we arrive at our destination, hundreds line up for relief of their suffering and distress, much of which results from simple and preventable causes. We go from village to village treating the sick, teaching concepts of healthy living and disease prevention, singing and telling stories to the children, and giving hugs and affirmation to those who stand in line just to be seen and touched.

We first traveled to the Dominican Republic for our mission experiences, but after two years, the number of students wanting to go on the trip had so increased that we decided to take two groups. Shirley and Don Spears had accompanied my husband, Steve, and me on our first two trips, and they agreed to continue

taking a group of eight to 10 students and health-care providers each year to the same area. My husband and I were invited by Dr. Don Vargas and his wife Cristina, an R.N., to join them in re-establishing a small clinic among the Miskito Indians in the remote mountain jungle village of Francia Sirpi in northwestern Nicaragua. This clinic was built in the early 1970s by students from Southern Missionary College and was run for nearly 10 years by SMC student missionaries and faculty members. Due to the Sandanista uprising in the late 1970s, all foreigners left, and the Tasba Raya area was left with minimal health care provided by one of the local workers who had been trained by the student nurses.

In 1995, Dr. and Mrs. Vargas decided to re-establish this mission outpost where Cristina had spent two years as a young student-missionary nurse. This is now the site where our second group of students and a medical team hold clinics each spring break. We also travel by truck or on foot to six or more of the surrounding villages, which are all quite isolated and therefore lacking in adequate health care.

As a result of these mission trips and our contacts in both Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, we have had the privilege of assisting several individuals and families in obtaining surgery not available in their countries. Through the power of God, who opens doors and touches hearts, we have been able to arrange free transportation, hospitalization, and medical and hospital care for four patients needing heart surgery and for one needing a mastectomy with special follow-up care.

Sustainability is one of the concepts we stress in the mission nursing class. To put into practice what we have emphasized, we now have student-missionary nurses, graduates from Southern Adventist University who have completed this class, volunteering to spend a year at one of these outpost areas. Since the mission nursing course began, more than 10 students have become missionary nurses, practicing the skills

## I asked God for guidance so that the class would not only teach concepts of health care in developing countries, but also touch and change lives and motivate students toward a life of service.

Picture  
Removed

**Chad Gilmore and Kimberlee Bruce with a small Dominican child during their mission nursing trip.**

they have learned and sharing God's love in underserved areas of the world such as the Amazon region of Brazil, the island of Paata in the South Pacific, Guam, Nepal, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, Africa, India, Guyana, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

The mission nursing course is accomplishing its goal of preparing student nurses eager to serve and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to go to the most remote areas to provide health care and education to a world in need. ✍

Picture  
Removed

**Tracy Gold and Marlana Worthy share God's love with a group of young boys during their mission nursing trip to Nicaragua.**

Picture  
Removed

**Jenny Reifsnnyder cleans a patient's absessed wound as part of her mission nursing training in Nicaragua.**

*taught nursing at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, where her areas of specialization are medical-surgical and critical-care nursing, as well as mission nursing. She is also a family nurse practitioner and practices one day a week in a women's health-care office.*

**Laura Currie Nylrady**  
*was born in China to missionary parents and grew up in China, Singapore, and Taiwan. She has been a*

*nursing educator for more than 30 years in the United States, as well as in Hong Kong and the Philip-*

*pines. For the past 16 years, she has*