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Big Picture Nursing

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Big picture nursing

Elena Englund '14 is surrounded by senior citizens in colorful hats and scarves, with a cacophony of languages bouncing off the walls.

She patiently takes their blood pressure, checks prescriptions, chats with some of them in Russian, while finding an interpreter to help communicate with those from other countries. It's Tuesday at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and Englund is spending several hours at her nursing station. She is not only assessing seniors' health status and history of chronic illness, she is also learning about cultures, customs and experiences while fulfilling requirements for her bachelor's in nursing.

Englund was just one of approximately 200 students enrolled in Linfield's RN-BSN program who are having a major impact in their communities and around the world, while completing their bachelor's degrees. Thanks to a new service learning requirement, students are honing leadership skills and learning about health needs outside of an inpatient setting with a focus on the needs of vulnerable individuals and populations.

Linfield's online RN-BSN program is designed for nurses with RN licenses who want to complete their bachelor's degrees while continuing to work. Because most of them work in hospitals and already have strong clinical skills, the focus of the RN-BSN program is on developing leadership skills and increasing students' awareness of needs within their communities,

according to Melissa Jones and Henny Breen, both faculty members in the RN-BSN program.

Breen noted that this program not only builds on RNs' previous experience, but offers a broader outlook on the nursing profession as a whole. "The service learning experience brings together all the things students are learning in the program," she added. "They are excited about this opportunity that they plan in collaboration with their faculty member as it provides them an opportunity to pursue an experience that is important to them as well as making a difference in the community."

Breen and Jones said students have been both challenged and excited about the service learning component, which supports the community-based philosophy of the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing.

"Because health care is changing in the community, we want to prepare our students to approach nursing practice by promoting health, rather than just treating illness," Jones said. "We are trying to expand on our students' current education and practice skills beyond an inpatient setting. They are learning different ways to influence health in a variety of settings in their local communities."

Experiences are as varied as the students and have included working with homeless and other underserved populations; developing health materials to aid in mentoring or counseling teenagers; and serving a teen pregnancy center and Boys & Girls



Club. In addition to local service learning experiences, students have the opportunity to complete their service learning in an international community such as Nepal, Costa Rica or Peru.

Helping immigrants

Englund, a native of Russia, chose IRCO because she understands the challenges and fears of moving to a new country. She spoke no English when she moved to the U.S. and felt isolated and apprehensive.

At IRCO she conducted regular health screenings, explained insurance procedures and in some cases, simply provided support and information. IRCO serves refugees from many countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Nepal, Ethiopia and Bhutan.

“My goal was not only to assess the seniors’ current health status and history of chronic diseases, it was also to learn about these people, their cultures, customs and experiences,” she said. “Taking vital signs and talking with each of them was a way to approach them as unique individuals whose primary need was to communicate with someone who would listen.”

She quickly learned that there are always ways to communicate. When an elderly Italian man struggled to communicate, Englund’s previous career as a music teacher kicked in. She began singing “Santa Lucia” in Italian and the man’s face brightened and he began to sing with her.

“Because of the music, an international language, the door for communication was opened,” she said. “I had been in the shoes of these people myself and I knew how they felt. Helping them with their health problems by approaching them holistically is my personal and professional task in this process.”

Giving back to Head Start

Erica Speck ’14 knows firsthand the benefits of Head Start – her children were enrolled while she was a student at Mount Hood Community College from 2008 to 2013. Serving the program in a nursing capacity meant she could make a difference in the lives of vulnerable and at-risk children and families, while also offering support, empathy and teaching.

Speck applied her nursing skills by providing information to families related to immunizations, nutrition and first aid. She worked specifically with the parent of a small child who suffers from chronic diabetes. In cooperation with a nutritionist and county nurse, she helped educate the parent and develop an action plan to keep the child’s diabetes under control. Speck also put together basic first aid kits for parents, conducted parent workshops and conducted safety checks in all the classrooms.

The project with Head Start forced Speck to consider a nursing career in much broader terms. Instead of only thinking about nursing in a hospital setting, the experience taught her that there are many ways she can apply her skills in her community.

“This helped me see the bigger picture of what I want to do and the people I might want to help,” she said. “I have



Elena Englund '14 checks the blood pressure of a senior citizen at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization in Portland. To complete her bachelor's degree in nursing through the RN-BSN program, she worked with seniors at the organization, assessing their health status and history of chronic illness, and learning about cultures, customs and experiences.

been trained for a service that I can offer. I like working in the community. I’m not sure what my path will be, but because of this experience I know I have many options.”

Stepping beyond her comfort zone

Kristen Bilous ’14 went way beyond her comfort zone when she spent a month working in Nepal.

At Shakti Milan Samaj (SMS), a nonprofit organization working to empower and support women and children who have been diagnosed or affected by HIV, Bilous talked with doctors, nurses and patients about current HIV/AIDS treatments and health, as well as Nepal’s progress in eliminating HIV.

She also volunteered at an orphanage operated by the Organization of Community, Child and Environment Development (OCCED), where she provided lessons in proper handwashing techniques and oral hygiene for preschoolers, puberty changes for preteens, and basic first aid and nursing assessments for teenagers.

As the only health care professional to assess, educate and provide care, Bilous said the experience enhanced her leadership skills and confidence. She also learned patience, open-mindedness, acceptance and that silence doesn’t have to be awkward. She was reminded of the importance of relinquishing control when abroad. “You are at the mercy of whatever the world throws your way,” she said. “Often it is unpredictable and unexpected.”

“More importantly, this experience has allowed me to understand what it feels like to be a foreigner,” she added. “I feel that I can provide more compassionate care to my foreign patients since I had a taste of what it feels like to be out of your comfort zone.”

–Mardi Mileham

Kristin Bilous '14 spent a month in Nepal, working with a nonprofit organization that empowers and supports women and children who have been diagnosed or affected by HIV. She also volunteered at an orphanage helping children and teenagers. She said the experience made her more aware of the needs of patients from different cultures and countries as well as other vulnerable populations.