

Nursing Students Break New Ground in Poland



Each spring semester, College of Nursing BSN seniors complete an intensive clinical practicum as the culmination of their studies. This past spring, for the first time, a group of students had the chance to complete their practicum in a different country.

Senior students Rani Ridenour, Laura Chime Swetland, Sara Wilson and Lori Yontz traveled to Gdansk, Poland as part of a formal exchange between UF and the Medical University of Gdansk. They completed a six-week practicum in March and April. Two faculty members, Joan Castleman, MS, RN, Clinical Associate Professor, and Veronica Feeg, PhD, RN, FAAN, Professor and Department Chair of Women's, Children's and Family Nursing, accompanied the students.

College of Nursing students and faculty were engaged in a number of activities, most notably sharing nursing experiences with their Polish peers. The students underwent extensive preparation in Gainesville before they left, spending time in the Alachua County Health Department, in order to observe how services were provided locally and compare them to services they would observe in Poland.

Once in Poland, students collaborated with health professionals in Gdansk on a variety of health promotion/disease prevention and community assessment activities.

"It was an amazing experience for our students to be able to connect with other nursing students and learn both similarities and differences in nursing and health care," Castleman said. "They met with not only faculty and students, but patients and their families, to gain a better understanding of the Polish culture and health care system."



The Polish health care system has undergone major changes in the past 50 years. A national physician's strike was actually occurring while the group was in Poland. The transition from communist rule and a state-provided system to a combination of public and private services in health care has impacted nursing education as well.

"Our students had the opportunity to observe and fully appreciate how the context of the health care system drives the services that are provided and how nurses and physicians are challenged when the political structure shifts," Dr. Feeg said.

The students and faculty were able to share insights with the Polish faculty and students in nursing education at the baccalaureate and graduate levels.

While language barriers certainly existed, UF faculty and students found ways to communicate with their counterparts. Observing clinical situations also provided a common language for both the Polish and UF students who found that the language of nursing was universal, Dr. Feeg said.



(Above and left): UF nursing students and faculty see the sights in Gdansk, Poland and interact with their peers from the Medical University of Gdansk.