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Health Volunteers Overseas

Improving Global Health Through Education

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October 28, 2010

Ms. Diane L. Gurney, RN, MS, CEN
President
Emergency Nurses Association
915 Lee St
Des Plaines, IL 60016

Dear Ms. Gurney,

As a fellow nursing professional, I know you understand the critical role nurses provide in caring for patients and their families. Nurses are often the first point of contact for patients and frequently are a primary source of information, care, and comfort. They are often the first person seen at birth and the last person seen at death. Their care extends across numerous settings and affects so many people beyond the patient.

Unfortunately, as I know all too well from my global experience, there is a severe shortage of health care workers around the world. WHO estimates the shortage at 4 million and they have indicated that the lack of health care providers is the most crucial need in global public health. Fortunately, work is being done to address this need!

As Chair of the Board, I would like to introduce you to the work of Health Volunteers Overseas. HVO is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1986 and dedicated to improving the availability and quality of health care in developing countries through the training and education of local health care providers. Currently, we have over 85 projects in 25 different countries throughout the world.

HVO designs and implements clinical training and education programs in child health, primary care, trauma and rehabilitation, essential surgical care, oral health, blood disorders and cancer, infectious disease, wound management, and nursing education. Program opportunities for nurse educators are available in Cambodia (in both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap), India, Tanzania, and Uganda.

In each site, HVO volunteers, all of whom are fully licensed professionals, are working with local faculty to improve their curricula, provide in-service training, and improve the skills of nurses. Sharing knowledge and contributing to the improvement of nursing and overall health care in these countries is truly a rewarding experience!

Unfortunately, due to the global recession, many governments have cut back on the limited funding they provided for health care. This has particularly affected nursing. The support provided through HVO volunteers' training and educating of nurses is more important than ever. I hope you will consider supporting our efforts, by becoming a sponsor or an organizational partner.

I also would like to request that you share with your members the needs and opportunities to volunteer their skills and work towards improving global health. Our nursing education programs are well-established and the sites offer opportunities for a range of different skill levels. Time commitments requested by the sites vary from 1 – 4 weeks.

Volunteers may choose to travel alone or with a colleague but are well supported throughout the process, through pre-departure contact with a US-based program director, previous volunteers to the site, and access to trip reports, lectures and skill training previously provided.

I have enclosed some background materials on HVO to give you further information. Please feel free to share these materials with your members, as the information can be accessed at our web site, www.hvouusa.org In addition, either Nancy Kelly, the HVO Executive Director, or I would be happy to talk with you to discuss how your organization can become an HVO sponsor.

Thank you for your help to improve nursing around the world!

Sincerely,



Julia Plotnick, MPH, RN, FAAN
Rear Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service (ret)

Encl.