

Student stories: Brooklyn Brauer abroad

Nov 7, 2019



Students in the BScN program have the opportunity to do a clinical placement in other countries at sites that partner with McMaster. This past summer, Brooklyn Brauer went to Nepal for her placement. She worked in the Emergency Room (ER) at Dhulikhel Hospital in Nepal. Here is part of what she had to say about the experience.

Q: Why did you want to go on a global clinical placement?

I wanted to combine my love for travel and my passion for nursing by going abroad. I thought it would be the ultimate challenge and the perfect scenario to try out global health.

Q: Why Nepal?

I had been speaking to students who went abroad before. Those who had been to Nepal had a really positive experience. I had no idea what the landscape or people would be like. I kind of went in blind and I'm very glad I did, because every day I learned something new, and there was so much to explore and I was in awe of the country itself.

Q: Tell me a little about the hospital where you worked.

The hospital had a variety of different units: ICU, medical, surgery, pediatric, PICU, NICU ... all with a limited number of beds, but big enough. It was laid out as a little resort. Every unit had their own building. When we needed to transfer a patient to x-ray, we would have to push them downhill or pull them uphill on the shaky cobblestones.

Q: Tell me about one or two important lessons or memories you brought back.

When I first got there, it was overwhelming. During the first week I thought: this is going to be impossible for me to integrate myself into this team because of the language barrier and cultural and nursing practice differences. By the end I was able to integrate myself into the most seemingly impossible situation. I became such great friends with the team members and I was taking on the role of the nurse. I believe that now, here in Canada, I can integrate myself into any sort of team.

Q: Are there certain practices that you were able to develop there?

Yes. I quickly realized that the role of the nurse is very different than here in Canada. Here we do a full head to toe assessment of patients and over there nurses don't. I was missing that skill but incorporated it through becoming friends with the interns who would perform physical assessments. The staff were very excited to teach me new skills and I was eager to learn.

I developed the ability to communicate with patients in the absence of language. The nursing staff speak English but they always spoke Nepalese to each other and the patients. In the beginning I was trying to figure out their routine. By the end, I was able to read situations and became very comfortable.

I also learned more about cultural competency in nursing.

Being in the ER, I experienced many chaotic and critical situations. They really heightened my sense of critical thinking and ability to read situations.

Q: What did the support system with McMaster look like?

I was working in the hospital for 2 months. My tutor and I met weekly for about 2 hours via audio conference. We'd chat about the things going on that week and discuss similarities and differences in practice. That was really helpful.

Q: Were you the only student onsite?

No, another student was with me. We lived together and shared a room in a guest house. It was nice to bounce ideas off each other. The guest house owner was one of the first nurses at the hospital back in 1996. She had a lot of knowledge about the history of the hospital. She also took great care of us and fed us wonderful traditional food.

Q: Did you get a chance to travel?

I had two months to travel. I went trekking, got to the Mount Everest base camp. It was a mind and body challenge, but that's what going there was all about. I love the mountains. I enjoyed exploring the cities and being courageous, bungee jumping, paragliding, doing all those things that push you outside of your comfort zone.

Q: Do you see yourself working overseas after you graduate?

I would love to. Having this experience has broadened my definition of nursing. I really hope to explore it further and other parts of the world and other cultures.

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