

Love Across Boundaries

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And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

Love is an undeniable force. In the Bible, we have been told that love conquers all and never fails. It is a power within all of us that is difficult to contain. Despite this truth, there are occasions when love can be restricted by barriers, making it challenging for those affected to fully see the love shine through.

In May 2014, a team of three pharmacists, one physician, and nineteen pharmacy students from the Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy with Palm Beach Atlantic University travelled to Honduras on a medical mission trip. The team served four clinics in four different locations and witnessed several challenges during their time serving, including language, cultural differences, faith, and health barriers. Amongst the nineteen students were four clerkship students who have shared their experiences in overcoming these obstacles.

Love Across Languages

Sarah's Journey

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10 (NIV)

The expression of love is a universal language. A simple smile can brighten someone's day. A reassuring touch on the shoulder can show support. A hug can disarm guarded emotions. Showing love towards another does not require translation.

I am not proficient enough in Spanish to carry on a conversation other than counseling a patient on how to take a medication. I did not always have a translator at hand to help me pray with each patient after counseling. I used my pocket language card to ask, "¿Le gustaría que yo ore por usted en Inglés?" or "Would you like me to pray for you in English?" Not a single patient refused.

One older gentleman in particular grinned and told me in Spanish, "God understands English." Some patients

prayed along with me in Spanish. I found that even though my patients had no comprehension of what I was saying, they were grateful for the prayer and seemed to be at peace despite their physical discomforts.

After praying with each patient I would ask, "¿Te puedo abrazar?" which roughly translates to, "Can I hug you?" Once again, not a single patient refused. One mother of four broke down crying as I embraced her. She held on tight, kissing my cheek and thanking me over and over again. I had merely provided her with basic counseling points in broken Spanish, yet my request for a hug broke through the language barrier and touched her heart. Giving a warm embrace provided encouragement that no words, whether in English or in Spanish, could quite convey. A heartfelt hug and prayer of encouragement communicated love across the language barrier, and gave me the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Love Across Cultures

Julie's Journey

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. Acts 17:26-27

Traveling to a foreign country in the name of Christ presents the challenge of sharing his love despite the obvious differences in cultural foundations and beliefs. How can we minister to people in a way that they will understand and appreciate, while respecting their practices that differ from our own? Our mission team certainly had to learn how to introduce and promote our own cultural health practices while still maintaining those practices of the Honduran people.

Our team had the medical knowledge and expertise, allowing Christ to shine through the treating of illness and providing of education on lifestyle changes. Again, the challenge here was promotion of change that preserved the people's everyday tradition. An example includes patient education on diet modification for those individuals who were diabetic or who had cholesterol or blood pressure issues. Sharing a meal with family was of great importance, and there was a limited

selection of food readily available. Therefore, it was difficult to tell people that what they were eating might not be what is best for their health. With respectful guidance we were able to make suggestions that accommodated their current preferences while providing better health outcomes, for example “use less salt,” “eat smaller meals more frequently,” or “make sure to exercise daily.”

There was also a different standard of hygiene in Honduras that affected health outcomes. Patients came to us with dental issues, which was due largely to the fact that they did not regularly brush their teeth. Children with rotting teeth would complain of pain or bad breath; some patients were even candidates for extraction. We were able to impact this need through providing toothbrushes and toothpaste as well as through teaching them how and when to brush their teeth. Being that the water they made use of for hygiene purposes was not always considered a clean source, our team was educated on how to manage waterborne illness through the use of pocket reference cards. These cards made for an accessible source of information that assisted with prompt management of a waterborne illness. Other important hygiene measures, such as hand-washing, were also taught and encouraged.

Part of loving someone is carrying on even we sometimes feel uncomfortable. Honduran women openly breastfeed their infants in public settings, which is a different standard than accepted in the United States. When a mother sat down to be seen and then began to nurse, it was important that we maintained our comfort so she could maintain hers. It was also a bit of a culture shock to see how many teenagers were pregnant or mothers already at such a young age. It was even harder to learn that not all of them were married, and some carrying children from an incidence of rape or misconduct of a family member. It was important that we gave these women the utmost care and respect as Jesus would have done, despite the differences in what we would deem acceptable in the United States.

Despite these cultural differences, the people of Honduras also taught our team what it means to love across boundaries. They exuded an air of gratitude for the care we provided; many were moved by tears after we interacted with them. This was a cultural change from the United States, where healthcare is often considered a right and not a treasured resource. In their appreciation, they humbled us and convicted us to be more grateful for the service provided by others.

Love Across Different Faiths and Beliefs

Lindsey's Journey

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Romans 10:17 (NIV)

Oftentimes we as Christians have difficulty sharing our faith with others, even within our comfort zones, in our own language, in an atmosphere that is familiar to us. I am no exception to that current cultural challenge amongst the Christian community. We struggle to share our faith for various reasons, whether it be fear of acceptance, fear of judgment, or simply because we do not know how. As Christians we are called to make disciples, and sometimes that means stepping out of our comfort zones. What better way to do that than to go on a mission trip?

As we boarded our international flight to Honduras, I could not help but feel anxious about what was to come. My worry stemmed from a feeling of the unknown, but I soon found comfort in realizing that my lack of confidence in myself did not matter, for God had a plan for Team Honduras, and His plan was perfect. This is the silver lining – regardless of geographical location, language, past experiences or current situations, God loves us all the same. Though we were initially surrounded by obstacles regarding language, culture, and faith, it quickly became less concerning as we interacted with the people in Honduras. As we prayed for our patients, suddenly our language of faith became universal; we divinely understood each other. I had an amazing encounter with a little girl and her grandmother. Upon asking to pray for them, the woman broke down in tears of joy as the little girl asked for a hug and kiss to display her gratitude for what we had done. Interactions such as these spark a moment of reflection of oneself.

I have never been the one in a crowd to eagerly open up regarding my faith, particularly through prayer, yet in the setting of this mission trip I suddenly felt at ease – God knew my heart. Now that we have returned home from this trip, the biggest challenge is to now transform our hearts and use the knowledge we gained and apply it to our everyday lives. We are always on a mission field and should strive to never miss an opportunity to reach out to others and exude our love towards them. As we interact with patients on a daily basis in the pharmacy, these opportunities are fruitful.

Love Across Health Barriers

Nikki's Journey

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 John 1:2 (NIV)

In Honduras, there are also many barriers that delay necessary medical care. These can be best described by the Health Care Access Barriers Model (HCAB). The HCAB model consists of three components that can cause stress for underserved patients: structural, cognitive and financial¹. We witnessed all three of these elements during our trip to Honduras.

Structural barriers are tangible obstructions to care, such as a lack of medical sites, healthcare personnel, and lab equipment. This can cause long wait times and decreased needed care for these patients. Cognitive barriers are those dealing with knowledge and education. Even with the proper medication and care a patient can be inadequately treated, if they do not understand how to take their medication or the importance of self-care, such as healthy diet and exercise. Lastly, financial barriers are all of the costs involved with patient care: medications, lab work, travel, surgeries and office visits. Without money to pay for these costs, a patient may have access to the necessary care without a means to afford it. Any of these barriers can lead to lessened patient care, delayed diagnosis and decreased treatment of preventable diseases. By knocking down these barriers, these issues can be avoided.

In our experience on the mission field I met a woman who had several barriers to proper healthcare. She had been diagnosed with hypertension five years ago, but lacked access to medicine or a means to pay for it. She remained untreated during this time and was now in hypertensive

crisis. During this time without proper care she had also developed diabetes. Unfortunately, her present condition may have been avoided with adequate care.

We showed her love across health barriers by providing her with access to free medication and lab work, a clinic for follow-up appointments, education on her medicines, adherence, diet and exercise, and, above all, the love of Christ and a promise of a brighter tomorrow. We prayed with her that the Great Physician would heal her body and provide her with the care that she and her community desperately need.

Conclusion

Love has been conveyed on several different levels throughout these experiences. That is the great thing about love; it shows up anywhere and everywhere. It always shines through, no matter what the circumstance or situation. God's love is seen on the mission field amidst the suffering and misfortunes, and it is encouraging to see such joy and hope in a place that looks as if only despair has touched it. The love of the Father rules all, and continuously finds a way to knock down any challenges that may be in the way. If you feel that God has placed it on your heart to show love through serving on the mission field, obey His call! God has a special plan for you, and if that includes serving across the nations to bring Him glory, we challenge you to take that leap of faith.

These well-known verses describe it best:

“Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ✠