

Lending A Nurse's Hand

I have always had a desire to be a caretaker—helping others is an instinct that comes naturally to me. When I joined the U.S. Peace Corps, serving as a health volunteer in Cameroon, Africa, I thought I would have the chance to use those instincts for the greater good. I began with an 11-week training program that immersed me in the language and the health concerns of the region. I learned how to teach local people about safe health practices, with a particular emphasis on preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. As I got out into the field, I found myself confronted by one phrase over and over again: “J’ai le palu.”

Literally it meant “I have malaria,” but I soon discovered that it was used to describe any number of illnesses—illnesses that I often found myself unsure of how to treat. One defining case involved my friend, Aissatou, and her severely malnourished 18-month-old son. Since there was no doctor in the area, she brought him to me, and I used my limited medical knowledge to concoct a baby formula out of a mixture of rice and milk. I thought this would help her son recover, but when I returned to the village later, I learned that he had died. I wanted to do more to help, but I lacked the knowledge and the training to truly make a difference.

The Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing has helped immensely in preparing me for a career in international nursing. The school attracted me originally because of the Peace Corps Fellows Scholarship. I still had a huge interest in international medicine and the school’s link with the Bloomberg School of Public Health and overseas opportunities all sounded like great opportunities to train myself to make a difference. In addition to the great faculty, I’ve developed relationships with my fellow students that I plan to maintain even after I leave. I know I will be able to draw on their strengths and expertise in the field as I do in the classroom.

I’ve also become involved in Baltimore schools and have reached out to high school students about opportunities in nursing. When you talk to people about any sort of medical issue, you need to talk to them in words they can understand. This applies when I’m explaining job opportunities to a Baltimore-area student, or when I’m communicating with a patient in another language to diagnose a problem. The school has given me the opportunity to interact with the community I serve with confidence, while still maintaining that personal touch.

Right now I am interested in becoming a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner and continuing my studies in violence against women. I hope to return to a French-speaking country in Africa, like Cameroon, and work with women who have been the victims of violence. Next time when confronted by a phrase like “J’ai le palu,” I will be ready to lend a confident and knowledgeable hand: a nurse’s hand.

—Claudine Hennessey, '08



The Charles A. Frueauff Foundation Peace Corps Fellows Scholarship was established in 1992 to support returned Peace Corps volunteers enrolled at the School of Nursing. The Frueauff Foundation, located in Little Rock, Arkansas, was established by a bequest from Charles A. Frueauff, who died in 1950, and now is headed by his grand-nephew, David Frueauff.

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