

Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing

news release

Nursing Students Use IT to Improve Global Health

December 14, 2009 — Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing's (JHUSON) technology-driven web platform for exchanging health information worldwide has tapped into a valuable source of innovation: the informatics-savvy student body.

In the fall 2009 Information Technology in Nursing course, the school's 130 students produced low-bandwidth digital modules for conveying vital health information to nurses and others who work in medically underserved communities here and abroad.

The projects target such diverse health imperatives as preventing HIV/AIDS among Bangladeshi sex workers and rickshaw drivers, addressing pediatric gastrointestinal conditions and halting the spread of swine flu in China, and improving prenatal care among Hispanic Americans.

Although filled with valuable information and presented attractively, the projects are digitally modest by design to account for the recipients' low-bandwidth capabilities. The student-led projects were developed as podcasts, recorded and freely accessible multimedia online lectures, and radio broadcasts—many in the language of the target audience.

The student projects will be distributed on the JHUSON Global Alliance for Nursing and Midwifery Electronic Community of Practice (GANM e-CoP), a web platform that allows health professionals to exchange knowledge even in areas with low bandwidth. The World Health Organization last summer re-designated GANM e-COP as the only nursing collaborating center with web-based information and communications technology as its focal point. At present 2000 nurses, midwives, and community health workers from 140 different countries are interacting in the GANM.

The nursing students' educational projects reflect JHUSON's commitment to "new-world education" and dramatically demonstrate that "It's not your mother's nursing anymore," said Patricia Abbott, PhD, RN, BC, FAAN, FACMI, co-director of the JHUSON Collaborating Center for Knowledge, Information Management, and Sharing. "It's about turning these young students loose and saying: What solutions can technology offer with low-resource places in mind?"

The results are "humbling and inspiring. The way our students are critically thinking and applying 'new ways of doing' with technology gives me great hope for the future" she said.

Megan Flora, who worked on a Spanish-language slide show targeted to Hispanic-American expectant mothers, said that the exercise taught her "the importance of tailoring your information to the specific patient, knowing about their culture and population" and avoiding "a one-size-fits-all presentation. Thinking about innovative uses of technology to reach and teach has been eye-opening."

For Shehzin Mozammel, producing a slide show for nurses in her native Bangladesh complements the country's effort to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. Her group's presentation, which is partially in the Bengali language, includes such basic instruction as how to properly use a condom.

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“By using the education I’ve gained in North America, I can educate my own people and explain the situation to them. Bangladeshis really admire people who have left ... and want to give back,” Mozammel said. “I’m very excited about this. If this is one way I can give back, it’s a start. I’m only one person, but I truly feel like I can make an impact, even a revolution. If I can teach people about sexually transmitted infections, it can make an impact.”

JHUSON instructor Krysia Hudson, MS, RN-BC, who co-taught the class with Abbott and Beth Kilmoyer, MS, RN-BC, said that her students’ projects will deliver reliable information where it’s most needed. “Putting a disease in the context a consumer can use is really very useful,” she said. “It also gets our students’ feet wet in developing applications that will be used. Our students want to make a difference, and with interactive and digitally distributable knowledge, they are seeing this come to life.” “What a difference from a dust collecting term paper” said Dr. Abbott.

To learn more or join the GANM CoP, visit www.ijhn.jhmi.edu, and then click on "About IJHN" and "PAHO/WHO." Or go to the website directly at: www.ijhn.jhmi.edu/aboutIJHN_Class.asp?id=AboutPAHO

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