Nursing as Ministry

Growing up as the daughter of World Partner missionaries, Naomi Olson always dreamed of becoming a missionary nurse. Now she is one.

“I believe that’s a dream God placed in my heart,” says Olson, a 2002 graduate. “While I was in nursing school at Bethel I knew I wanted to end up overseas, though I never really knew what roles I might fill.”

After spending a year in Liberia with the missions organization, SIM (Serving in Mission), Olson came home to the United States in 2006. However, her heart remained with the people she had served. In September 2007, opportunity arose for her to return to Liberia.

“They needed a nurse to come as international matron mentor,” says Olson. “My job description is focused on the training of clinical and management staff in the hospital, but as often happens overseas, my role entails a whole lot more … Because we have very few trained staff, I often take care of patients as well.”

For now, Olson plans to remain in Liberia until July 2009, but she has a greater vision for the future. “I have dreams of coming back sometime more permanently to open a nursing school somewhere in southeastern Liberia.”

Olson is one of many students and graduates from the School of Nursing who view nursing as more than a profession. “I am convinced,” she says, “that all of life has to be ministry. In Liberia or in the U.S., I believe that the best way I can glorify God as a nurse is to work with excellence, and
to live my life in a way that others can see Christ’s work in my life.”

A group of current nursing students and recent graduates have a similar perspective. In May 2007, students joined the Task Force team to the Dominican Republic with the goal of glorifying God through their talents. The missions organization, Students International, plugged those students into areas of interest according to their major.

Ten nursing students and one faculty member eagerly helped to provide health care in a small clinic in the town of Jarabacoa. They also assisted two doctors and a dentist by holding mobile clinics in the surrounding communities and teaching basic skills, such as toothbrushing.

During the fall semester of 2007, Bethel sent a group of students back to the Dominican Republic on the first semester abroad program to that country. Nursing student Miranda Martin took advantage of the program and gained much experience as a result.

“We worked in a clinic,” says Martin, “as well as visiting a rural clinic in a neighboring city … We worked with several pregnant women, giving check-ups and any supplies we had, like prenatal vitamins. We also gave pap smears to women.”

Martin and fellow nursing students assisted in providing vaccinations for women and children, too. And when students weren’t helping medically, they were praying for each woman and child who walked through the door.

Martin’s approach to nursing was impacted by her interaction with the doctors she assisted. She saw them living out their faith in their relationships with patients as they prayed with them and spoke about Christ. “They view their job as a ministry,” she says, “and they really showed me how true that can be.”

Unlike Olson, Martin does not plan to practice medicine overseas. However, her approach to nursing is similar. “I know that in America things are a bit different,” she says. “Even though we cannot push our faith on anyone, we can make it available to others. We can offer what we have to our patients, and that is simply giving them hope.”

— JOY NOEL LIGHTCAP (’03)