



SIUE nursing students assist Costa Rican patients

by Megan Weiser

February 5 2019 2:10 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's commitment to service was again on display as the School of Nursing took a nine-person team comprised of students, faculty and an alumna to Costa Rica Jan. 5-12, where they saw nearly 1,000 patients in four clinic days at four locations.

Valerie Griffin, DNP, assistant clinical professor and director of the Family Nurse Practitioner Program (FNP), led the team that traveled in partnership with Central America Mission Projects (CAMP). In seven days, they visited La Carpio, Pavas, Alajuela and Coco, fed children in the street at Infiernillos and played with children at Ninos con Carino Orphanage.

Joining Griffin and her daughter Hannah were Leah Baecht and Whitney Heischmidt, who are both post master's doctor of nursing practice students and faculty in the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) program. CRNA students Alexis Tewell, of Freeburg, Michael Perkins, of Worden, and Megan Reynolds, of Hamel, were team members, along with FNP students Amanda McDannald, of Rochester, and Marissa Mahan, of Chatham.

Rounding out the group was SON alumna Mackenzie Schutt, who was master of ceremonies at the School's October 2018 Gala that focused on global service. CAMP President Dan Whitlock and SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke convinced her to join the group.

Griffin describes the most challenging aspect of these visits. "Global service requires flexibility and the ability to critically think about the assessment data in order to develop a plan of care appropriate to the patient, as well as using the limited resources available," she said. "We saw 978 patients in four clinic days and were able to host a new clinic for the first time in that region."

Previous experience allowed the SON team to strategically structure patient visits for efficiency. "Having been to some of these sites previously allowed us to re-evaluate the process and make improvements," Griffin said. "When Pastor Elmer informed us that he had 400 people coming to get a new pair of shoes and he wanted to send them all through the clinic, I honestly thought to myself that this was going to be difficult to accomplish. But at the end of that particular clinic day, we saw 495 individuals!"

The team dealt with some serious issues such as diabetes, hypertension, cellulitis, skin cancer, tuberculosis and a wound requiring stitches.

Griffin points to a positive learning experience, because students are taken out of their comfort zone. "In the United States, we have many resources available in order to care

for patients,” she said. “In Costa Rica, these resources are limited. Students acknowledge this and care for their patients using more than just clinical skills.

“They are utilizing a level of cultural competence that exceeds what we expect from nurses in America. This level of compassion becomes the focus of the care we provide and reminds the students of their calling to be a nurse.”

The [SIUE School of Nursing's](#) programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling nearly 1,400 students in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.