

# Learning to work with interpreters: an international placement experience in rural Laos



**VALDA FROMMOLT**  
**HAZEL RANDS**  
**LYNNE BROWN**

# The WIL Laos Project



- Working with Community Development Project in rural Laos since 2010
- Nursing faculty and students working with local Health care workers (LHWs) and interpreters (3 week clinical placement)
- Primary health care focus
- Almost no English is spoken
- Most families living below poverty line
- Very limited access to health care
- Low levels of health literacy



# Immersion placement

- Nursing students and staff live in basic village homestays.
- Being immersed in the village supports the value of WIL
- Provides insight for students into the impact of social determinants of health, as they observe the local living conditions first-hand
- Groups rely on interpreters to help communicate with their ‘families’



# Previous research



- Living with local families develops the students' understanding of village structure, social conventions, local culture and language
- Students' cultural awareness becomes heightened during the placement as they reflect on their own values and cultural identity
- Providing culturally safe health care is dependent on developing relationships and trust through
  - language acquisition,
  - non-verbal communication and
  - being able work effectively through interpreters

## Effective Communication



- International clinical placements to developing countries provide unique learning opportunities for student nurses, with research identifying positive learning outcomes as
  - » improved communications skills and
  - » enhanced cultural competence

# Working with interpreters

- A common response from returning students is the frustration and difficulties experienced when working through interpreters
- Some teaching strategies have been implemented to support the students' preparation



# Pre-departure Workshops



Faculty led workshop where students

- discuss expectations and logistics,
- participate in group work with past students to prepare health education sessions,
- discuss concerns about cultural differences,
- explore their own cultural biases and
- develop some basic language skills

## Ineffective communication can arise from cultural variances

- Can arise between members of inter-professional teams and also between clients and health care providers
- Important to utilise interpreters in **all** communication in clinics



# The WIL placement

- Students were able to recognise the impact of their developing cultural competence on their own nursing practice as they learned to
  - » Accept and respect difference in others
  - » Enhance own communication skills
- On their return to Australia, students also reported
  - » increased confidence in working with interpreters to assess patients and
  - » Ability to incorporate newly developed communication skills into their practice to support the delivery of appropriate care for clients from culturally diverse backgrounds.

# Benefit to The Laos Project

- Focus on building trust within the community by providing education for the Lao health workers
- Able to improve health literacy of the interpreters, who do not have health industry background
- Sharing knowledge with Lao HCWs through interpreters creates a more trusting and inclusive environment, where local capacity increases and a truly sustainable partnership can be maintained.



*Thank you for listening*

