UNC-CH School of Nursing

N489 Practicum in Nursing: Global Health Experience

Health, Safety and Travel Tips

**HEALTH ASSESSMENT:** NURS 489 requires that you see your health care provider, visit a travel clinic or make an appointment with UNC Campus Health Services' Travel Clinic prior to travel. You should receive any required vaccines, including Hepatitis A, at that visit. You must provide OSA with documentation verifying this visit and that you have received the necessary vaccines. If you have any health concerns or chronic illness you should discuss them with your provider to develop a plan of care while abroad. UNC health insurance including medical evacuation will be purchased through OAS. Review the materials found at the HSR website regarding clinical compliance for NURS 489. Compliance must be completed well in advance of travel. Check HSR, the Sakai course site and the syllabus for deadlines.

**PLAN FOR ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE WHILE IN-COUNTRY:** Be sure to make a plan in advance of travel or immediately upon arrival for medical care, if needed. It’s best to have a plan in place so that if you do need medical assistance you have already identified options.

**RESPIRATORY ILLNESS:** There are many environmental factors in the developing world that can cause respiratory distress...from simple dust and plant pollen to all kinds of environmental pollution, such as smog, exhaust from vehicles and smoke from cooking fires. If you have a history of respiratory problems such as asthma do not forget your medication! Air pollution can be a trigger for asthma related illness.

**FOOD and WATER:** Food and water quality is one of the major health risks facing travelers. The governing rule is to not drink tap water and not eat any food unless it has been well cooked or can be peeled and the interior eaten. Don’t purchase food from street vendors, no matter how enticing it looks! Bottled water is usually cheap and readily available; carry some with you all the time. Be sure to brush your teeth with bottled water. When eating in a restaurant ask for bottled water. Eating yogurt prior to and during your travels can be a big help in establishing “good” bacteria in your GI track.
TRAVELERS DIARRHEA is a common complaint. It is usually a benign illness that lasts only a few days. But it can strike suddenly without warning. To be prepared bring small packets of Kleenex tissue, handi-wipes, waterless antibacterial hand wash and Pepto-Bismol and/or Imodium. Also don’t forget the BRATY diet: bananas, rice, applesauce, toast and yogurt. It will come in handy if you do get travelers diarrhea. Vegetarians and Vegans should bring vegetable bullion to help with re-hydration. If you experience severe vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours or if you have bloody stools, contact a physician. Don’t start taking antibiotics until you’ve been evaluated by a physician. Overuse of antibiotics is a global problem and you don’t want to contribute to it by taking them unnecessarily.

Dietary suggestions: Start out on Day 1 (during the acute phase) with fluids such as Gatorade, 7 Up, Ginger Ale or an oral rehydration solution. Try to eat small amounts of saltine crackers or clear soup. On Day 2, if the vomiting has stopped, begin the BRATY diet. Plain white rice or chicken noodle soup is a good place to start. Over the next couple of days slowly build up to a normal diet.

IMMUNIZATIONS:

**Hepatitis A:** This vaccine is required by the School of Nursing for all students regardless of the destination country.

**Hepatitis B:** Vaccination is required for those working with body fluids, injection needles, and the like. You are already in compliance with the SON.

**Typhoid:** Some countries require this vaccine. However, be aware that immunization is sometimes only 50 to 75% effective. Therefore, adherence to safe food and water guidelines is important to provide additional protection against this and other diseases.

**Malaria:** Protection against malaria will be required for some countries. As with many types of medication, protection is not always 100%. Some students acquire Malaria even when taking the medication as prescribed. In some areas, you may be advised to use a mosquito net and/or skin repellant in addition to taking medication. If you know you will be in an area with mosquitos take some citronella candles. They are a pleasant way to discourage the pests!

**Cholera:** Good adherence to safe food and water guidelines is important to protect against this disease. There is no vaccine available in the U.S.
Rabies: Rarely is rabies vaccine required. But it is often recommended. You need to consider the environment in which you will be living. If you know you will be around animals, you should go ahead and be vaccinated. For most travelers, being aware of your surroundings and staying away from animals, even pets, is adequate protection. You cannot assume that household pets have been vaccinated against rabies. It is best not to approach or touch an unknown animal. If there are pets in your home, ask first before petting. If you are bitten or scratched you should seek medical attention immediately.

Other: Make sure that diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, mumps, measles and rubella as well as all other routine vaccines are up-to-date. It is recommended that you have had the tetanus vaccine within the past 5 years.

Clinical Safety: Bring exam gloves and antibacterial waterless hand wash for your own personal use. Use them in any clinical/patient encounter where they would be required in the US. Your safety comes first. It is also important to remind patients and colleagues that the use of gloves and frequent hand washing are protections for others as well. These items aren’t generally used the way we have come to expect in our hospitals. Staff and patients may make fun of you. Don’t pay attention! Smile and proceed with what you need to do. Try to offer appropriate explanations for your actions. Be sensitive, as well, to the reality that health care agencies may not have the resources to provide these protections to their staff and patients.

Emotional Health: You may experience situations never faced before: a sense of helplessness due to communication barriers, feeling appalled at the apparent disregard for patient safety or confidentiality, uncertainty about how to respond to cultural differences in understanding or defining health and illness, inadequate education and skill set of nurses and doctors you work with and a deep sadness or anger at a death that would have been preventable in the US. Find someone you trust to talk with about your feelings. Recognize that there may be nothing you can do right now to change the situation. But realize that for many of the problems you see, there are local people who also recognize these problems. If you were in-country for a longer period of time, you would be able to identify these people and partner with them to seek change. In the meantime, try to interact with patients and colleagues in the caring manner you’ve been taught. And value this experience as one that is life changing for you and provides a view of the world that will inform your nursing care for years to come.
FLIGHTS: When you book your flight plan to arrive in-country during day light hours. Know in advance where you will spend your first night and who will meet you at the airport. Advance planning is very important for safety. You can’t “wing it” the way we can when traveling in the US. You don’t want to place yourself in a vulnerable situation because you are unfamiliar with new surroundings.

IN-COUNTRY TRAVEL: Avoid traveling alone! Avoid riding mopeds or motor bikes! Avoid traveling at night! Avoid riding on top of the buses or in the back of pickup trucks! Don’t hitch hike! Don’t go camping! DO travel during day light hours and via reputable travel agencies or with recommended drivers. In spite of all the focus on vaccines, in reality, traffic accidents are the biggest threat to health and safety.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES: Needless to say, the expectation is that you will NOT participate in any type of illegal activity such as use of illegal substances. As noted in the Release to Hold Harmless document, that you signed before leaving home, other countries have different laws, regulations or standards regarding such issues as drug use. You DO NOT want to run afoul of the law! You will not have the same assurance of civil rights protections that we have in the United States.

The drinking age for alcohol is generally 18 in most countries. Be sure to check ahead of time. Even if drinking is legal, do so in moderation. You don’t want to place yourself in a very vulnerable position by excessively drinking in a strange place, often with a new language and little in the way of a safety net. Do not accept alcohol from strangers. Lacing drinks with drugs happens sometimes with obvious dangerous results.

PASSPORT: Make sure that your passport will remain valid for 6 months beyond your travel dates. Check the embassy website of your destination country to learn about visa requirements. For travel to Africa and Asia special visas are often needed. Travel to Europe and Latin America is usually easier—with receipt of a visa upon arrival in-country. As a part of HSR compliance you will be asked to make copies of your passport with emergency and health information included. It is suggested that—upon arrival at your destination— you leave your passport in a secure location and that you carry a photocopy of your passport and emergency contact information with you at all times. Leave another copy with relatives in the States and give 1 copy to OSA in advance of your departure.
AMERICAN CONSULATE/EMBASSY: You will be required to provide OSA with contact information for the US Embassy in your destination country. You will also go to the US State Department website and register with your travel information. This is so-in case of emergency- the State Department can contact you regarding evacuation.

MONEY: Do not plan on cashing personal checks. Even Travelers Checks are questionable these days. Many banks now offer a special global debit card. If your bank does, take advantage of this benefit. You can also use your regular debit card for making purchases where credit cards are accepted or to withdraw cash from an ATM. Visa is most widely accepted. Master Card, AMEX and Diners Club are also accepted in some places. Don’t forget your PIN numbers! You can get a cash advance from a credit card at local banks. It is suggested that you carry about $100 in US cash to use in case of emergency. Bring clean-as new as possible-bills...not wrinkled or torn...banks won't accept damaged bills!

You will probably need your passport to exchange money or get cash from a credit card in a bank.

Do not tempt the honesty of locals by leaving your credit/debit cards and cash in exposed places. Conceal them someplace in your belongings in your room. Don’t bring flashy, expensive jewelry (engagement rings, for example). Carry a bag with a sturdy zipper and don’t open your wallet in public where you are exposing large quantities of cash or credit cards. Stay away from crowds—that’s when bags are slashed- and be observant of your surroundings. Use your “street” smarts.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATES: There are several internet sites for currency exchange rates. Print a cheat sheet to carry with you. One of them is: www.oanda.com

GENERAL SAFETY: Talk with locals to assess the level of safety concerns. Use reasonable caution as you would any place in which people perceived to be wealthy (you!) are in contact with others who are not. Here are some general rules to follow: Dress conservatively. Do not prominently display jewelry, expensive cameras or other costly items. Carry your valuables in a concealed secure place. Do not leave your belongings unguarded in public spaces. Learn where it’s safe to walk during daylight. Walk in groups of 2 or 3 in the evenings and take a taxi after dark. Learn how to give directions to your home to a taxi driver—in the local language. If you are near the equator it will be dark by 6:30.
After dark, travel by taxi is recommended. Always carry the name, address and phone number of your local contact.

Stay away from large crowds, particularly political or religious ones.

**WEATHER:** Find out what the weather is like before you go. In many areas of the world seasons are defined—not as summer and winter—but as dry and rainy seasons. If you are in an area during the rainy season, be prepared with clothing that is lightweight and dries quickly (not jeans, for example). Crocs are great for rainy weather, leather shoes are not!

**DRESS:** People in low income countries, particularly in rural areas, dress more conservatively than we do. In most places, women do not wear shorts or tops with a lot of exposure. Dressing that way is disrespectful to the people in whose country you are a guest. Tourists often dress (and underdress) in outlandish ways. You do not want to contribute to stereotypes nor be stereotyped yourself by the clothing you choose to wear. Local people may appear tolerant but the way we dress can appear unattractive and insulting to them. In rural Africa, women don’t generally wear pants so dresses or skirts are appropriate. Especially in rural areas, slacks and button shirts may be more acceptable for men than jeans and T-shirts. Roads and even city streets can be quite uneven so pack walking shoes and sandals with thick, sturdy soles.

**BARGAINING** can be one of the joys of life. It is a form of recreation in many parts of the world that goes back for centuries. People may think you are a foolish person if you placidly accept their first offered price. But there are places to haggle and places not to. High-end stores catering to tourists usually have fixed prices while street and market vendors are always ready to bargain. Haggling over prices seems to work with some people, while for others it doesn’t. Try not to carry the bargaining too far. The quality of life for most vendors is so far below ours, it wouldn’t be a terrible thing to “over pay” for an item or two. Enjoy the interaction and the chance to practice your communication skills! Think about how important the item is to you and what it would cost in the US. In general start at 50% of the asking price and slowly work your way up to a compromise.

**TIPPING:** In the US, hospitality workers are dependent on tips because they are paid very poorly, otherwise. However, in most places around the world, restaurant and hotel employees are paid some kind of minimum wage and tipping is a nice bonus. Check travel guides for information about local expectations for tipping. When in doubt, tip at about 10%.
PHOTOGRAPHS: Local people may feel uncomfortable being photographed. For some, there is a fear that by taking their image, you are stealing a part of them. Some will turn away from you, others will reluctantly but graciously consent to letting you photograph them, and still others will want you to pay them for the photo. Ask for permission before taking a photo and offer payment. Another way to “pay” for their photo is to purchase something that they are selling. After all, you are in their country in part because of the vibrant cultural background they provide. The tourist industries of many regions of the world profit from the presence of local inhabitants and they deserve a share of that income.

TELEPHONE SERVICE: Making telephone calls to the US from pay phones can be frustrating. However, you can often make calls easily from internet services. You may want to purchase a local cell phone or sign up for global service before leaving the US.

Tell your family not to expect many phone calls. Email or Skype are easy ways to stay in touch. Be sure to call home if there is a disturbance in your area that may make the international news!

PACK YOUR BAG: Be sure to check the weather in the area where you will be traveling. In general it’s a good idea to plan on taking layers of clothing that can be mixed and matched easily. It’s also a good idea to take clothing that can be easily hand washed, will dry quickly and not need ironing.

Miscellaneous:
Umbrella/rain coat/Crocs (or equivalent)
Bath towel
Plastic flip flops for showers
Small flashlight and/or head lamp
Camera
Alarm clock

Personal Toiletry items:
Toothbrush/paste
Shampoo
Shower Gel
Prescription meds properly labeled
Antibacterial waterless hand-wash
Pepto-Bismol/Imodium
Tylenol/Ibuprofen

Toilet Paper
Kleenex/Hand-wipes
Band aids
Antibiotic ointment/cream
Feminine hygiene products
Box of exam gloves
Soap for hand washing clothing
**Gifts:** Gifts and donations are optional. These are suggestions only!

- Southern Seasons’ Moravian Cookies or dried chocolate covered fruit
- Thank-you cards.
- Body lotion/cream
- Antibacterial waterless hand wash
- Children’s books which are appropriate in terms of phenotype and lifestyle - avoid images of blonde children with lots of toys or other consumer goods, in other words.
- Stickers for children...not candy
- Tooth brushes/paste
- Feminine hygiene supplies/underwear for girls (especially in Africa)
- Flip Flops
- T-shirts
- School supplies/book bags

**Medical Supplies:** Be sure to check with the organization you are traveling with to know what type of supplies would be helpful. UNC’s ‘med world’ donates supplies to groups who are traveling for medical mission type of work.

[www.med.unc.edu/medworld](http://www.med.unc.edu/medworld)

**Health Education Resources:** If you will be in an area where you are involved in health education programs, check out the Hesperian Foundation which has a wonderful (multi-lingual) collection of community based health education resources, including titles regarding training of traditional birth attendants, HIV programs in the community and environmental health.

[www.hesperian.org](http://www.hesperian.org)

**On the Plane:** Our body loses 8 ounces of fluid for every hour we are in the air. So it’s important to drink plenty of water and fruit juice while in flight. Avoid drinks that contain alcohol and caffeine. For long flights, get up and move around every 2 hours to help with circulation and prevent edema in your feet and legs.

Toiletries that you carry on board must be in 3 ounce bottles that will all fit into a 1 quart zip lock plastic bag. Take a carry-on bag with 2-3 days of clothing and essential supplies, such as medication. This is in case your checked bag ends up in another part of the world!

Your checked bag must weigh less than 50 lbs. Contact your airline about extra baggage charges.