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NURSING AND MENTAL HEALTH IN LIBERIA

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Background: After a decade of civil war, the people of Liberia had enormous mental health problems related to extensive physical and psychological violence. As there was only one psychiatrist in the country, the Liberian Ministry of Health requested the help of the Carter Center in Atlanta Georgia to address the country's mental health needs. Nurses were the largest group of health care providers and a program was launched to prepare 150 nurses to become Mental Health Clinicians over five years. I was asked to create the curriculum for this program in partnership with the people of Liberia and to work with Liberian educators, clinicians and health care administrators to implement it in a "train the trainer" model. I have been involved in this project since 2010 without compensation.

Objectives: The main objectives of the program were to: 1) prepare Liberian nurses/physician assistants as mental health clinicians; 2) strengthen the knowledge and skills of mental health trainers/educators in the existing Liberian educational and health care systems; 3) enhance the teaching environment for mental health professionals/paraprofessionals.

Methodology: I developed a six month curriculum in partnership with key members of the educational, practice and administrative sectors in Liberia. It was based on advanced practice psychiatric nursing content taught in the United States and consisted of five courses taught in a train the trainer model over a 6 month period of study. I held curriculum workshops in Liberia in which all courses were reviewed in detail and then revised, refined and reviewed again in a process of continuous interaction.

Outcomes: The outcomes of the study were: 1) there have been 166 graduates of the program with mental health clinicians placed in all 15 counties of Liberia; 2) the program facilitated the creation of a registered psychiatric nurse accreditation program by the Liberian Board of Nursing; 3) content from the program was incorporated into pre-service nursing curricula in Liberian nursing schools.

Conclusion: As this program ended, the Ebola virus disease broke out in Liberia. The mental health clinicians provided much need education, support and care. In addition, the World Bank funded a new initiative to train 100 child and adolescent Nurse Mental Health Clinicians in three years. I created this curriculum and am continuing to work on implementing it in Liberia. To date 64 of the 100 nurses have graduated.

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