

Changing Health Belief Attitudes through a Study Abroad Experience

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- 1. Introduction - The U.S. has a growing number of Spanish speaking individuals who need access to health services. Many U.S. health professionals are not intimately aware of culturally different health practices, specifically from Mexico. A study abroad educational program was created to expose students to a different culture specifically to learn about health practices and beliefs and communication for health related issues.
- 2. Objectives - 1) Students will describe shifts in perception and attitude regarding Mexican culture; 2) Students will demonstrate improved communication skills with native Spanish speakers; 3) Students will be able to identify how they can apply the study abroad experience to their future practice as a health professional
- 3. Description/Report - In the past 3 years, students participated in a 3-week emersion program in Cuernavaca, Mexico consisting of Spanish courses in a health context, daily site visits to hospitals/clinics, and lectures by traditional healers. In addition students volunteered at a health facility. Students were given a pre-trip and post-trip questionnaire assessing their attitudes, stereotypes, and concerns about Mexican culture.
- 4. Results/Discussion - All students reported a positive change in attitude after the trip; a better appreciation of traditional healing methods; a better understanding of the confusion some Mexicans may have in navigating the U.S. health care system.
- 5. Conclusion - Study abroad programs are an excellent method for improving long lasting cultural competence through meaningful participation in another culture. This type of experience can fulfill community-based educational requirements
- 6. Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy - Students and therapists who participate in this kind of program can not only learn communication strategies (e.g., language and mannerisms) but gain an understanding and appreciation for culturally different ways of managing health issues which can enable practitioners to provide culturally relevant care.