

# INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-CLINIC PARTNERSHIPS IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE VIA AN ACTUAL CASE STUDY

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# TIMING MAY NEVER BE BETTER.....

- Theme of 2018 WFOT conference – Connected in Diversity, Positioned for Impact
- Advances in opportunities for international traveling – globe connected via air travel
- Advances in technology, including opportunities for meetings and training via video conferencing
- Rise of social media platforms
- Expanding knowledge base of occupational science and occupational therapy practice – social and occupational justice, promoting health and well being via engagement in occupation
- There are an increasing number of educational programs and clinicians who wish to engage in some level of global practice. Experiences can be either long term or short term.....

# CONTEXT: SHORT-TERM MEDICAL MISSION TRIPS

- Focus of present paper does not include long-term medical missions, level 2 (extended clinical) student international fieldwork placements; or trips focused on general volunteer activities.
- Much has been written about the mistakes that can be made on short term medical mission trips, primarily in the context of the education of medical students, but there is also literature within physical and occupational therapy education, especially under the topic of international service learning (e.g., Cipriani, 2017; Pechak & Thompson, 2009; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2015; Tupe et al. 2015; Witcher Hansen, 2015)
- In short, one can end up doing more harm than good, and negatively impact groups which follow you.
- The focus too often is on the university which travels to the host agency, rather than the needs of the host agency being the primary driving force.
- What should be a partnership isn't, instead it's a team of "benevolent experts" telling the host agency what they can do better.
- Poor or little preparation will guarantee a negative experience for all parties.

# WHAT DO BEST PRACTICES LOOK LIKE?

- Focus on *reciprocity* – in terms of a partnership, in terms of learning
- Focus on safety for all parties
- Development of some level of *cultural competence*, not just awareness. And it should include solid understanding of local health care practices.
- Focus on *sustainability* – via the *education and training* of partners and members of the host community; via the use of products which are locally available and renewable; via a long term commitment between the partners.
- “One and done” experiences will almost never produce lasting changes or improvements. The partner often knows their needs, they will benefit from a longer-term relationship.
- Never underestimate what you can learn from your partner.
- Students love to do direct service, but some of your goals may not be the agency goals.
- A dedicated faculty member is very important – the “faculty champion.” A visit to the agency by the faculty member prior to the trip is critical.
- For students to learn, *guided reflection* can make a huge difference.
- Put the agency in the driving seat, their empowerment, not your expertise. Its not about you.

# OUR CASE: THREE WAY PARTNERS

- Misericordia University (MU) , Dallas, Pennsylvania: Educational institution for occupational therapy
- Therapy Missions™: Service organization of occupational and physical therapists promoting education and training globally
- Mustard Seed Communities (MSC), Jamaica: Host agency serving several hundred children and adults with developmental disabilities in residential settings across the island.
- Situation in a nutshell: There are only about a dozen OT professionals on the island. The children and adults at MSC would benefit via increased training for the health care professionals at the agency who do provide therapeutic services. MSC contacted TM for assistance. When MU contacted MSC about providing services via short term medical mission trips, MSC linked MU with TM, and we all began to talk about how to coordinate services and resources, and then.....



# A FIVE YEAR PARTNERSHIP WAS ESTABLISHED!



# SUGGESTIONS FOR A PARTNERSHIP

- Start small, but prepare for a long term commitment.
- Prepare, prepare, prepare. Understand your partner. Understand the culture. But above all, prepare to be flexible and think on the spot. Example: In Jamaica, in a little while might mean.....
- Your partnership can accomplish much, if your relationship is built on mutual respect and learning.
- Stay connected throughout the year. We have multiple video conferencing sessions to plan between the three partners. We keep in touch on professional and personal levels.
- Get excited, as the opportunities to partner, learn and share resources have never been greater, and you can be a part of it.