Lessons learned from a service trip to the Dominican Republic

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Service experiences
The students worked at a local primary care clinic and completed home visits in a nearby community. They also toured the hospital in San José de Ocoa to see healthcare in action and provide some physical and emotional support to patients through massage and conversation. ADESJO also organized a panel discussion with two experienced nurses in which the students were encouraged to ask questions about nursing practice and the national healthcare system.

Making connections
The service trip to the Dominican Republic allowed the group to connect with the people and see places beyond the tourist districts. The students learned about the country’s culture and history, including the enduring effects of colonization and slavery, as well as the effects of government policies on health in both urban and rural communities. For example, waste removal services were limited throughout the country. Massive rainstorms wash trash into the rivers and oceans, creating sanitation issues and increasing the risk of exposure to diseases such as water-borne illnesses.

The trip reinforced the importance of investigating health problems and performing thoughtful cultural assessments to create individualized plans of care. One of the most impactful learning experiences for the students was understanding the effects of social, residential, and environmental history on patient health. Although this content is taught in the classroom, the group’s firsthand experiences translated the theories into action. The trip pushed the students out of their comfort zones, allowing them to develop relationships with people from the Dominican Republic and across the US and increasing their understanding of global health issues.