

SWEDISH RED CROSS

The Red Cross School of Nursing

Practical training in primary health care at refugee centres

For several years the Swedish Red Cross School of Nursing has been taking active steps to internationalize the general health and medical care courses run under its health and medical care training programme.

In 1987 Taylor and Ås drew up a programme of proposals entitled "The Internationalization of Training". This material is designed to give guidelines and ideas on the subject, and includes recommendations for literature which may be of use in the teaching of theory. The material may also be used effectively in practical training.

A project is being run at the school with the aim of charting the students' views on the internationalization of their training.

For several years a number of students at the school have been given the opportunity to undergo periods of practical training abroad. The experience they have gained has also been documented in an ongoing project.

Lectures on international issues are arranged for students and staff as part of the school's general activities. There is an international activity group whose work includes fund-raising for a number of countries and producing information on conditions in those countries.

Another aspect is a joint teacher-student project aimed at integrating the basic principles of the Red Cross into training courses.

These are some examples of the measures taken to improve both students' and teachers' knowledge of international issues, internationalization being one of the school's stated objectives.

Some students are given practical experience of work in refugee centres. These one-week periods form part of the students' practical training in primary health care. The first placements in refugee centres were made in the spring term of 1989, and since then four to six students from each class have taken part in the programme. All but one of these traineeships are in

Red Cross refugee centres, the exception being a position in a refugee centre run under the auspices of the Swedish Immigration Board.

Practical training objectives

The objectives for practical training in primary health care follow those set out in the training plan for health and medical care and the curriculum approved by the Stockholm County Council Education Committee for the care sector.

Added to these are the programme's own goals, namely that the students shall, during their practical training at refugee centres:

- become familiar with the objectives for, and organization of, the work;
- analyse the way in which the work corresponds to the principles of the Red Cross;
- acquire more profound first-hand knowledge about the conditions in which refugees live in Sweden;
- develop the ability to empathize with people from other cultures, thereby bringing greater understanding to their contacts with them.

The nurse and/or senior student nurse at the centre's medical office act as instructors. This means that the main task of each student is to follow the instructor in her work.

The students are required to write reports analysing the problem areas or circumstances they encounter in the course of their practical training.

Students' reports

Of a total of 19 reports submitted to date, eight deal with the organization of health and medical care at the refugee centres, five with the refugees' reactions, three with the refugee centres' child care programmes and two with refugees' encounters with Swedish society. One tells the story of a refugee and her family.

The organization of health and medical care at refugee centres

Some of these reports contain descriptions of work at the health and medical care offices, while others contain a detailed account of a typical

day's work. The reports may also describe the organization and objectives of the refugee centres.

Several of the reports contain descriptions of the psychosomatic problems which affect many of the immigrants. The staff situation and the workload are also highlighted. One report points to the risk that the heavy workload may result in the staff becoming "burnt out". The shortage of interpreters is also emphasized. Another aspect covered is the different views of ill-health held in different cultures, and important steps which should be taken, for example in the form of medication.

Refugee reactions and staff attitudes

Five of the 19 reports focus on the reactions of the refugees and the attitude of the staff.

The descriptions centre largely on crises experienced by the refugees. One student says that she had encountered these problems in the field of psychiatry but had been unable to properly understand and interpret the patients' reactions. Her contact with refugees in the centres had clarified the picture and given her a better insight into their problems.

One report is an analysis of staff attitudes and the importance of maintaining a therapeutic approach. "There is a risk that an over-intimate relationship, or love affair, will compromise the staff's impartiality", writes this student in her report.

Another report analyses the attitudes of interpreters, while yet others underscore the importance of giving the staff proper guidance.

Child care activities

Three reports focus on child care activities at the refugee centres. They concentrate largely on describing the objectives of this programme and the activities involved. Although the impression given is generally favourable, several students note that teenagers are often "left out".

Specific problems relating to children are highlighted. Some children, for example, have been given far too little information on what happened to their families, and show signs of insecurity.

Language difficulties do not appear to arise here as they do among the adults.

Refugees' encounters with Swedish culture

A couple of the reports deal with this problem in particular. What can be done to make this cultural encounter easier? In this context it is important that both sides, Swedes and refugees, are well-informed.

These reports also mention the shortage of interpreters.

A refugee's story

One report describes the experiences of a woman and her family, who had been deported after spending about 18 months at a refugee centre. The student who wrote the report had been in contact with the family through an interpreter and in other ways, and had acquired detailed knowledge of its circumstances. The report gives some indication of the difficulties involved in really penetrating other cultures.

The report also contains a number of questions and reflections on Sweden's refugee policy.

A recurring theme in all the reports is the students' opinion that the experience gained provided them with knowledge and insight which will be of considerable use to them in practising their profession.

What have the students learned?

One student writes:

“During this week of practical training I have seen a refugee centre from the inside and I would not have missed it for anything. It has meant more to me than I can express in writing”.

The students' experiences may be summarized as follows:

- they were given information about, and important experience of, work at refugee centres on a general level;
- they gained personal experience of cultural differences and “cultural clashes”;
- they became involved in the plight of the people they met, and also saw the risk of becoming “burnt out” in this type of work;

- they reflected upon, and questioned, official ways of dealing with refugee matters.

Taken in aggregate, this experience appears to be highly relevant for them in their future careers.

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STATUTORY MEETINGS OF THE MOVEMENT

(Geneva, 16-24 October 1990)

The Gulf crisis and its humanitarian implications dominated the work of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and that of the Executive Council of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which met respectively in Geneva on 22 October and on 23 and 24 October 1990.

● **Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent**

When it met on 22 October under the chairmanship of Dr. Ahmed Abu-Goura, the Commission issued the following press release:

“The Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, trustee of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, at its meeting in Geneva on October 22nd, 1990, expressed its deep concern about the consequences, in humanitarian terms, of the recent events in Kuwait, the massive deployment of military forces in the Gulf area and the possibility of the Middle East being drawn into an armed conflict that would cause innumerable victims among combatants and the civilian population. The Commission deplored the current difficulties encountered by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in fulfilling its humanitarian mandate, which have left countless numbers of people without protection, and that disputes about the legal classifications of conflicts too often hinder the implementation of international humanitarian law.”