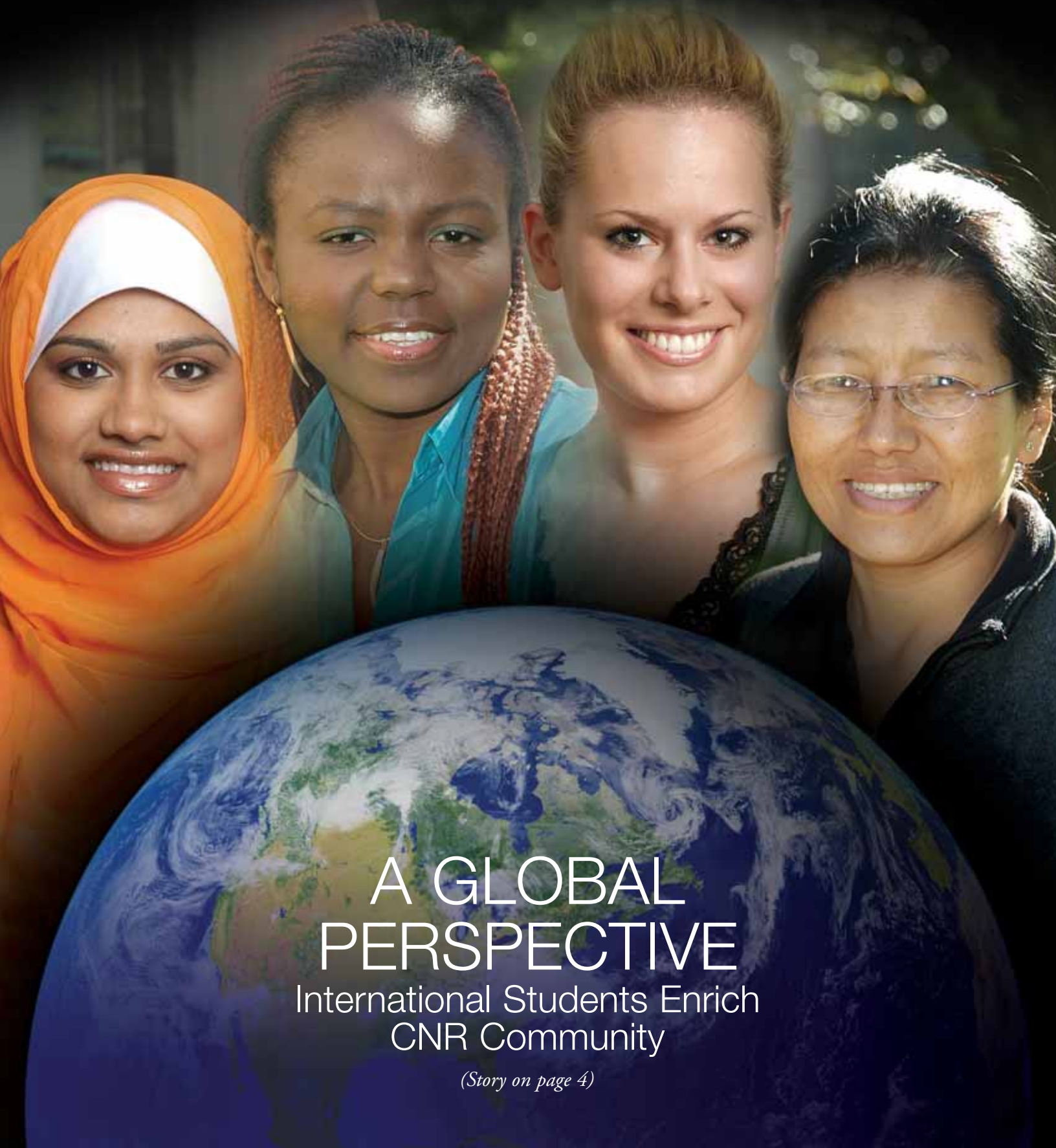


# QUARTERLY

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## A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

International Students Enrich  
CNR Community

*(Story on page 4)*

# Quenching the Thirst For A Better Life

## CNR & Hope for a Healthier Humanity Bring Healthcare Education to the Impoverished of Latin America

By Irene Villaverde SNR'04, GS'08

For the College's School of Nursing, the partnership with Hope for a Healthier Humanity Foundation and its sister organization, The Pan American Catholic Health Care Network, was an opportunity to take the School's mission and philosophy to people hungering for real care and health care education in the Caribbean, Latin and Central Americas.

"In 2007, I attended a Hope for a Healthier Humanity Foundation fundraising event at which HHH Executive Director Mary Healey-Sedutto was presenting," says Dr. Mary Alice Donius, Dean of the School of Nursing. "I knew very little about the work of the Foundation. But after hearing Mary's presentation distinguishing the work that was being done, it was so evident that we and they had a symbiotic belief system, a congruency of mission and philosophy. I knew that night that we should be the Foundation's official nursing school. Happily, today we are just that."

"Simply put, our mission is to assist the peoples of the Caribbean and Latin America achieve sustainable improvements in healthcare and greater access to advanced education and training in the medical, dental, and nursing fields," says Healey-Sedutto. "Our partnership with CNR's School of Nursing has enabled HHH to achieve the goals we've set to a higher degree than I thought even possible."

During the past three years, CNR faculty and students have traveled to Honduras and Panama to instruct professional healthcare and lay workers alike in normal and high-risk maternity and OB policies, procedures, sterile technique, treatment of the diabetic patient, and infection control.

In May 2009, CNR Clinical Assistant Professor Monte Wagner accompanied a group of nursing faculty and undergraduate students who participated in a course for *promotores de salud*, lay healthcare workers, in Choluteca, Honduras. "These are people who usually live in the communities they serve, are clinical volunteers, community health workers or village leaders who have formal healthcare training," explains Wagner. "Some are nurses or dental technicians who have learned all they know on the job, but most simply, they are men and women who have a passion for helping others in their community."

Although to date Wagner has made six trips with HHH to Honduras and Panama, his experience in these remote areas predates his HHH involvement by many years, beginning with his work as an Army medic in 1989.

"I was 24 years old and didn't speak a word of Spanish when I was first sent to Central and South America to set up clinics, vaccinate livestock, and treat children infected with parasites," says Wagner. Now, nearly 20 years later as a nursing professor and nurse practitioner, he revisits many of the same impoverished locales as part of the HHH initiative, "walking the same streets, but in a different uniform."

Aurea Irizarry, an undergraduate nursing student who participated in the trip to Choluteca along with Wagner and Healey-Sedutto, described the experience as both uplifting and heartbreaking, especially with regard to the children living in such impoverished circumstances.

"I've never seen poverty on that level before. One night as we were walking back from dinner at a local restaurant, I saw little children with bottles trying to steal water from sprinklers. Still, the love and dedication these people feel for each other, and the way they welcomed us, was truly amazing. I'd never been out of the U.S. before, but I fit right in. I came back from Honduras with a true appreciation for all we have and all we take for granted and a deep desire to do more. I hope that more of our students will be given the opportunity I had."

Healey-Sedutto says that Irizarry's experience is typical.

"The poverty is beyond anything you can imagine, indescribable poverty. Across the street from where we were training people, there was a tiny, tiny one-room shop where a woman sold cold water and sodas. She had two very young children, a boy about three and a girl about five. We learned that they were her grandchildren, abandoned by her daughter who had become a street worker. After two days, the grandmother

begged us to take the children home with us. She was willing to give up her own grandchildren because she knew they were born into poverty and would die in poverty, with no way for them to get out of Choluteca, to ever have an education or an opportunity. And so she begged us to take her grandchildren away from her.

“Whether you're in a mud hut or a college classroom, every moment should be a teaching moment. It's the 'teach a man to fish' principle: wealthy nations will readily drop hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of supplies into these countries, but if you haven't taught the people how to use them, you've done no good at all.”



*Some of the youngest recipients of Hope for a Healthier Humanity's healthcare education initiatives in Latin America. Inset top: HHH Executive Director Mary Healey-Sedutto with two local children from Choluteca. Inset bottom: A student practices basic wound care procedure.*

“CNR’s involvement in Honduras and in Panama has really taken us to another level. The faculty involvement certainly enriches our programs’ initiatives, but more importantly, the student involvement adds something very special, very personal. You can see it in the faces of the people, the men and women who participate in our educational programs. It just happens every time we’re there, somehow one or more of them manages to bring their children or their spouses, and it’s important for them to involve their whole family in the experience.”

According to Healey-Sedutto, the people who come to the program are hungry to learn and to learn as much as they possibly can, asking the faculty to “teach us everything you know.”

Wagner agrees that “education is paramount” to improving the lives of the people most at risk due to poverty and lack of knowledge.

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Typically, the first part of the HHH program focuses on childbirth and well child care before moving on to treatment of patients suffering from diabetes or hypertension. The second teaches techniques such as CPR and emergency and basic wound care.

In cases where there are no medical supplies available – and there are many – volunteers teach students to use common household items such as chicken wire and wood to make splints and plastic shower curtains and household bleach to create sanitary childbirth “bedding,” a vast improvement over the dirt floors on which most women give birth.

“Increasingly, says Healey-Sedutto, “the faculty sees men coming to be trained in maternity and delivery methods. In Panama two men walked for two days straight, day and night, sleeping on the roadside, to get to the

class. At the end of the week, they set out and walked for two days in the beating sun on dirt roads to get back to their homes, proud of what they’d learned and thrilled to have had the opportunity to do it.

“They’re so thirsty for knowledge, and so absolutely grateful. At the end of every single program, whether it’s in Panama or El Salvador or Honduras, spontaneously the students have a party for us, singing and dancing and playing music.”

Recalling his “warmest memory” of such a time, Wagner tells of sitting on a mud floor, watching smoke from the cook fire wafting along the hut walls, eating two fried eggs, white rice, and tiny fresh water shrimp, and drinking a warm Coke. “It was the best meal I have ever had.”

In the end, he says, “We all leave with a sense of humility, torn between satisfaction in knowing that we’ve ‘done the right thing’ in giving them knowledge, hope, and encouragement and sadness in having to leave them then to their own devices without our being there to see them through.”