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Inspired by caring for Jeremias

May 19, 2010

While on a nursing co-op in Argentina, Rita Carpenter met a young boy at the Hospital Pedro de Elizalde in Buenos Aires. She and fellow Northeastern University student Sarah Driscoll developed a bond with the child, Jeremias, and his mother. Carpenter recalled the boy being discharged and returning soon after with pneumonia. He ended up leaving the hospital again on the last day of Carpenter's co-op.

It was that kind of experience — helping nurse children such as Jeremias back to health and playing with them during their hospital stay — that helped Carpenter decide where she wants to take her nursing career.

"I want to work with the less fortunate populations that don't have the resources that they need," says Carpenter, who worked at the hospital from September through December last year.

In her **experiential learning** opportunity, Carpenter started out shadowing the nurses, prepping medications and retrieving critical supplies at a local pharmacy.

As she gradually overcame the language barrier, Carpenter says she became more active in working with the patients, setting up IVs and giving them medication to treat their various conditions. She spent more of her time in the oncology and respiratory unit, where many of the children suffered from leukemia and other cancers. She also spent time observing a nurse who met routinely with mothers of children born prematurely to keep track of their growth.

Carpenter says it was not only a positive cultural experience, but also a valuable professional experience working at a public hospital where the need was so great. While she was thousands of miles away from the classrooms at Northeastern, Carpenter even received an unexpected homework assignment — the hospital's medical staff asked her to give a presentation on the U.S. health-care system.

"It was definitely a unique experience," Carpenter says. "I got a lot more out of it than just nursing."

Carpenter begins her senior year this fall in the **Bouvé College of Health Sciences**, but she is also looking into traveling to Haiti this summer to volunteer in the country that was ravaged by an earthquake in January.

Prior to her experiential learning opportunity in Argentina, Carpenter's first co-op was as a patient-care assistant at Tufts Medical Center, and she is determining now where her final co-op will be this fall.

Regardless, she said, she will remember Jeremias.

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