Beyond Borders

What Does It Mean to Be a Global Citizen?

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Abstract Becoming aware of global trends and issues is the first step in understanding one’s position and role within a larger global context, thereby aiding in the development of an individual’s global identity. Gaining an understanding and appreciation of the interconnectedness of our world as well as respecting and valuing existing diversity provides a foundation that enables us to challenge injustice and take action in personally meaningful ways. Nursing is a profession that is found in every country and has the inherent ability to bridge cultures through the delivery of universally accessible health care.
The increasing interconnectedness of societies around the world provides us with the opportunity, and the obligation, to develop global identities (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). Use of the Internet and social media and the relative ease of international travel enable easy and instantaneous access to face-to-face, voice, video, and photographic connections to almost anywhere in the world. The migration of families and communities to other countries, voluntarily (e.g., to escape political turmoil, reunite family, or strive to improve economic opportunities) or because of more emergent situations such as natural disaster and war, results in the resettlement and assimilation of large numbers of people into new societies and cultures. It is estimated that more than 244 million individuals worldwide emigrated from their home countries in 2015, representing an increase of 71 million annual migrations since 2000 (International Organization for Migration, 2015). The massive relocation of people has implications for both immigrants and the host societies. International business transactions and tourism are yet other opportunities for increased exposure to foreign cultures, languages, health beliefs, and political systems, highlighting the need for everyone to view themselves as global citizens.

Global citizenship is defined as “awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act” (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013, p. 858). Becoming aware of global trends and issues is the first step in understanding one’s position and role within a larger global context. Gaining an understanding and appreciation of the interconnectedness of our world, as well as respecting and valuing
existing diversity, provides a foundation that enables us to challenge injustice and take action in personally meaningful ways (Jones, 2016). Social justice, based on the key elements of human rights and equality, is a core value in nursing that supports societal efforts to provide equitable treatment and a fair allocation of health resources to all citizens (Matwick & Woodgate, 2016).

**Caring**

Nursing is often referred to as a caring profession and is consistently rated as the most trusted profession (Gallup, 2015). The goals of practice, education, and research in our discipline are to improve health for all who make up our global society and to embrace the idea that human health, illness, and emotions are universal phenomena. Nursing is also a global profession: it exists in every society. More than simply providing care, nurses are essential in shaping policy related to the delivery of health care and building the health capacity of entire nations (Wood, 2010). Being a global nurse citizen does not require travel beyond the borders of the United States. Caring for diverse populations in your home community provides the opportunity for greater understanding and leadership that addresses health care inequities threatening the health of immigrants and other marginalized populations.

**Embracing Diversity and Social Justice**

Embracing cultural diversity requires open-mindedness, inclusivity, cooperation, and respect for all interprofessional colleagues and recipients of nursing care (Douglas et al., 2014). Becoming more self-aware and engaging in self-reflection may help identify personal biases, values, or beliefs that serve as barriers to or facilitators of effective health care delivery. In addition to providing translation services that promote optimal means of disseminating information,
Clinicians can strive to develop a wide range of communication strategies that take into consideration culturally appropriate behaviors such as eye contact, personal space, gestures, touch, and nonjudgmental language. Nurse caring can be extended to include expressing desire to learn more about an individual’s cultural norms, beliefs, and values. Nurses and other clinicians can use this information to become more cognizant of disparities that affect planning of nursing care, resolving conflict with coworkers, and developing policy to improve the health of individuals at home and abroad (Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, 2007).

Promoting and sustaining social justice in the context of global health is a tall order, but coordinated efforts of nurses around the world can influence outcomes of programs and policies addressing the world’s health issues. Serving as a guide to direct collective action, it is important for all nurses to become familiar with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Health Organization’s *Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030* (WHO, 2016). The SDGs, created as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals, are an intergovernmental set of 17 goals consisting of 169 targets with 304 indicators to measure compliance (Cesario, 2016). These broad, overarching goals were designed to be applicable to all countries, irrespective of a country’s socioeconomic status or political structure. Even the highest-income countries have huge areas of inequality and health disparity. In addition, the actions of higher-income countries have the greatest potential to affect future development and sustainability of global health-related endeavors (White, 2016).

Over the next 15 years, the SDGs are intended to stimulate action in areas of critical importance for the health of humanity and our planet. More than a list of health care initiatives, the SDGs
stress the need for a healthy environment and promotion of well-being in areas such as protecting the planet from degradation, halting climate change, fostering peaceful societies free of fear and violence, establishing global partnerships, boosting the economy and education, and ensuring that all people can fulfill their potential in dignity, equality, and prosperity (United Nations, 2016). Basic human rights, such as access to food and clean water, health care, education, a healthy environment, and safety, are universal and should be guaranteed to all people in every nation (Jones, 2016).

Universal access to health care, not to be confused with the universal insurance coverage initiative set in action by U.S. government, ensures that health services are delivered to all of the world’s people without financial risk or hardship. Evans, Hsu, and Boerma (2013) describe universal access as having three essential dimensions (see Box 1).

**Responsibility to Act**

The final piece of the definition of global citizenship is the responsibility to act:

This entails taking personal responsibility for decisions and actions, including respecting others, obeying rules and laws, and setting a good example to others. Global citizens feel a sense of responsibility to help when the rights of others are violated, no matter where in the world they live, keeping in mind that local action can create global change. (Jones, 2016, p. 48)
The International Council of Nurses has put forth recommendations suggesting areas in which nurses can become involved in helping governments determine health targets and designing a roadmap to achieve those targets using the SDGs as a framework (see Box 2). A well-educated and appropriately dispersed nursing workforce, universal access to health care, and collection of high-quality data related to health comes are essential to improving global health.

**Conclusion**

Global citizenship transcends the boundaries of all nations and cultures. Events and conditions happening in one part of the world are now shared instantaneously through social media and have profound effects other parts of the world. The number of social media network memberships and frequency of accessing the Internet have been associated with developing a global identity (Lee, Baring, Maria, & Reysen, 2015). It is essential that nurses stay informed of world events and communicate with others to strategically implement models of care that offer high-quality, sustainable health care policy (Wood, 2010).

The profession of nursing has a rich history of providing service to the global community. We can build on these past experiences by capitalizing on opportunities to move nurses into leadership roles in coordinating global health care. Whether it is extending a welcoming hand to diverse population groups in your home community or venturing out to work in other nations, consider what you can do as a global citizen to promote health worldwide.
Box 1. Three Essential Dimensions of Universal Access to Health Care

1. Physical accessibility is the availability of quality health care delivered at a geographic location near the people who require services, with convenient hours of operation, adequate transportation, and implementation of appointment systems that accommodate the needs of the local residents.

2. Financial affordability refers to a family’s ability to pay for services without financial hardship. This includes, but is not limited to, the price of services, cost of transportation to reach health care facilities, lost wages, and insurance.

3. Acceptability is poor when recipients of care perceive services to be ineffective or when social and cultural factors such as language or the age, sex, ethnicity, or religion of the health provider discourage them from seeking services. Services must be physically accessible, financially affordable, and acceptable to patients if universal health coverage is to be attained.

Source: Evans, Hsu, and Boerma (2013).
Box 2. International Council of Nurses Recommendations for Nursing’s Role in Global Health

Optimize the existing workforce in pursuit of the SDGs and global universal health coverage (e.g., education, employment, retention).

Anticipate future workforce requirements by 2030 and plan the necessary changes (e.g., a fit-for-purpose, needs-based workforce).

Strengthen individual and institutional capacity to manage human resources for health policy, planning, and implementation (e.g., migration and regulation).

Strengthen the data, evidence, and knowledge for cost-effective policy decisions (e.g., an electronic database to count and track all health workers within national and subnational contexts).


Lee, R., Baring, R., Maria, M., & Reysen, S. (2015). Attitude towards technology, social media usage and grade-point average as predictors of global citizenship identification in Filipino


