

GSN brings home lessons learned in Ghana

The Graduate School of Nursing has extended its reach halfway around the world with an international initiative that reaps benefits at home as well as in Ghana. Last summer, GSN assistant professors Rosemary Theroux, PhD, and Robin Toft Klar, DNSc, spent two weeks in Ghana researching women's self-care practices at a health clinic newly established by the Women's Trust, a non-governmental organization that supports social and economic empowerment for women and girls living in poverty.

An extension of work they had done in Worcester, Drs. Theroux and Klar's African project was launched by a serendipitous coincidence. As director of the UMMS interdisciplinary clerkship for first-year GSN and School of Medicine students, Theroux chose to focus on the problem of high infant mortality in Worcester's African immigrant community for the clerkship's community service learning project. Clerkship participants, in cooperation with the Worcester Infant Mortality Task Force and the Worcester Healthy Start Initiative, sought to understand and address the problem of high infant mortality—defined as death before age one—among Ghanaian immigrants to Worcester. Their findings pointed to the roots of high infant mortality lying in cultural practices and beliefs instilled in Ghana that resulted in delayed prenatal care and subsequent premature and low weight births.

Family nurse practitioner and GSN post-master's certificate alumna Linda Messenger, MS, RN, had just partnered with the Women's Trust when she read about the clerkship's work with Ghanaian women in a recent issue of the UMMS magazine *Vitae*. Messenger called Theroux and Klar and invited them to join her on her next trip to Ghana to participate in the Women's Trust's first-ever medical clinic in the village of Pokuase.

The Trust's first health initiative under Messenger's direction—screenings to detect hypertension in women of childbearing age to help combat both maternal and infant mortality—dovetailed perfectly with the community clerkship's research in Worcester. Working with local health care providers, the American nurses provided free services to 430 patients over six days.

In addition to collecting data regarding women's self care in Pokuase, Theroux and Klar provided clinical services to local women, screening for high blood pressure (hypertension is a leading cause of premature birth for Ghanaian women), testing for anemia and assessing for previous treatment of malaria. "The people we met in Ghana were so appreciative of our work, and the Ghanaians here in Worcester are appreciative of what we are doing in their homeland," said Klar.

"Global work is very fulfilling," added Theroux. "We feel we're helping people and making a difference."

Theroux and Klar are returning to Pokuase this month, and have plans for future work linking Worcester with Ghana. They are seeking funding for additional projects and ultimately hope to bring students with them. "Our international work is truly translational," said Theroux.

"It evolved from our local work and now has local applications for our students and our patients," concluded Klar.