

On the Road to Better Healthcare in BIMP-EAGA

Nancy Brisa A. Fuentes, RN, MA (Nursing)

Delegate and Presenter, 2nd BIMP International Nursing Conference 2009
Conference Chair – 1st BIMP International Nursing Conference 2008

Independent Consultant in Child Health and Professor of Nursing
Davao City, Philippines

Something very good is brewing in the healthcare sector in the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-East Asian Growth Area) Region. It actually started in 2008, with the first BIMP International Conference in Davao City, Philippines. Like any initiative, there were a lot of doubts and uncertainties. Few people are comfortable with new ideas and the concept of exchanging ideas, and dealing with public health issues is one of them.

The conference, however, exceeded everyone's expectation – at the very least, as far as a genuine desire to share experiences which were common in the region. Like women at childbirth, the organisers and delegates applauded the successful conclusion of the initial conference, knowing fully well that they had passed the first hurdle.

Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, Malaysia, validated that optimism! Unlike the first time when the uneasiness was evident, there was a very warm and healthy exchange among nursing practitioners secure in the thought that we share the same vision and advocacy for health, nursing and nurses. There may be enough reasons to doubt: this time, the global problems became more pronounced and the odds more intimidating. The scenario was far from encouraging. On the contrary, it became very clear that there is so much to do with so little time, and so few resources.

Instead of retreating in the face of nearly insurmountable challenges, however, it was the other way around. The very dynamic Sabah Nurses Association, with its president, Dr. Hjh Bibi Florina Abdullah, and the members of its organising groups, only seemed to spur the delegates to draw closer to each other for strength, inspiration and assurance of oneness. If there were any doubts about the camaraderie and harmony within the region, they were gone by the time the conference ended.

The graciousness of the members of Sabah Nurses Association as hosts was definitely one factor that helped fire up the delegates. The optimism that they showed us was contagious enough to stimulate discussion and healthy exchanges to the end. It is one thing to receive people because you have to. Our Kota Kinabalu hosts, however, showed us what real hospitality is all about. It is difficult not to come up with the best results under such comfortable conditions and warm friendships that the organising committee gave us from the time we set foot at the airport, right to the end of the conference.

The conference was fortunate to draw the participation of experts in health, nursing education, clinical and public health nursing from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and from outside the region, coming from as far as Australia, England, Scotland, Thailand and the United States. Their presence and their presentation not only added lustre to the gathering but more importantly, widened the perspectives of delegates and expanded the discussions to make them as culturally diversified and yet universally viable as possible. The conference gathered a rich collection of resources from the plenary and concurrent sessions at which everyone was so generous in sharing.

By the time the curtains fell at the Grand Ballroom of Pacific Sutera, Sutera Harbour Resort at Kota Kinabalu, ending the 2nd International Conference, there was no doubt that it had been a stirring success! More than that, however, there was no doubt in the minds of everyone committed to the cause of improving healthcare and nursing practices in the region that this would not be the last meeting of its sort.

We look forward to meeting again in 2011 in Indonesia! Thank you, Dr. Dewi Irawaty, for accepting the challenge of hosting the 3rd BIMP International Nursing Conference. Meanwhile, there are tasks to be done, events, meetings, and exchanges that will take place in 2010 before we gather again.

The sharing of best practices will continue. Everybody knows that it is a process and not a destination. The important thing, however, is that there are enough people committed not only to a healthy exchange of experiences but more importantly, to the continuing search for the best health practices that will benefit the people in the region.

The baby is now a child. Along the way, it will slip and fall.

No child goes back into the mother's womb because it encounters difficulties. In like manner, the advocates of improved nursing practices in the region will press on, knowing fully well that this is the only way to achieve maturity. The road to achieving this goal may be long, hard and occasionally frustrating. What everybody should bear in mind, though, is that this path has to be travelled. But as we have decided to dream and enlarge our vision, the travel can be joyful and fulfilling! If it has not occurred to us yet, it should be clear by now. Finally, we are on the road!