

Building bridges to peace through nursing

—by Donna Perry, RN, professional development manager

On a warm May evening in Tel Aviv, two nurses arrived at Ben Gurion Airport, each looking somewhat anxious as they waited for the other. The nurses, one Israeli, one Palestinian, had never met. One had come from Haifa, the other from the West Bank. They were about to embark on a journey together to participate in a Israeli-Palestinian nursing education collaborative in Boston.

Professional development manager, Donna Perry, RN (left) with visiting nurses, Sister Mary Subhi Yusef, RN (Palestinian; center), and Shlomit Dubovi, RN (Israeli).



(Photo provided by staff)

Though I have long wanted to host Israeli and Palestinian nurses together at MGH, only recently did an opportunity to fulfill that wish present itself. While attending a meeting in Jerusalem of Israelis and Palestinians working on joint healthcare projects, I met some wonderful people who were quietly working to provide health care and forge international relationships. One of these individuals was Professor Michael Silbermann, MD, executive director of the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC). The MECC is a unique partnership between the United States and the health ministries of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Turkey that sponsors collaborative research and education projects to reduce the incidence and impact of cancer in the Middle East. Its work is supported by The National Cancer Institute of the NIH (see related article on page 6).

I spoke with Professor Silbermann about the possibility of bringing Israeli and Palestinian nurses to MGH for an educational experience through our International Nurse Consultant Program. I crafted a formal proposal for a collaborative program that would involve MGH, the Middle East Cancer Consortium, the National Cancer Institute, and The Institute for Nursing Healthcare Leadership. Last November, I learned that funding for the program had been approved, and we began planning for the first visit.

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The first two nurses selected for the program were Shlomit Dubovi, RN, head nurse, from the inpatient Chemotherapy Unit of the Oncology Department of Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa, and Sister Mary Subhi Yusef, RN, from the Education Department of the Palestinian Ministry of Health who teaches at Ibn-Sina Nursing & Midwifery College in Ramallah, on the West Bank.

During their time at MGH, Dubovi and Yusef had an opportunity to spend time with senior vice president for Patient Care Services, Jeanette Ives Erickson, RN, and executive director of The Institute for Patient Care, Gaurdia Banister, RN. Their visit coincided with Nurse Recognition Week, which allowed them to attend many of our educational events, presentations,

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and Research Expo. They met with leaders and clinicians from Oncology and Palliative Care. Their impressions: "Staff were so welcoming. They gave us pamphlets, booklets, guidelines, and handouts. They were so generous."

Our guests had a chance to sit in on several conversations related to diversity, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence, including a lunch in the Chaplaincy with Imam Talal Eid; Rabbi Benjamin Lanckton; director, Mike McElhinny, MDiv; and Diversity Committee member, Firdosh Pathan, RPh. Both Dubovi and Yusef found our interfaith chaplaincy model and our efforts to support patients' spirituality very inspiring.

Following their visit to MGH, Dubovi and Yusef spent time at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and Beth Israel Medical Center. They visited leaders at the Boston College William F. Connell School of Nursing

and had dinner with Sister Callista Roy, RN. Yusef teaches the Roy Adaptation Model in her nursing curriculum, so it was a thrill for her to meet Roy and hear about her theory first-hand.

It wasn't all work. Dubovi and Yusef got to do some sight-seeing and have some fun while in America. We spent an afternoon at Sturbridge Village and went to Maine and walked along the ocean in Ogunquit. They accompanied me to visit my family, and we enjoyed a good old-fashioned American cook-out on Mother's Day.

Everyone who participated in this collaborative program benefited from the experience. Yusef felt the program strengthened her ability to educate her students in the areas of oncology and palliative care. Dubovi said she gained knowledge she feels will enhance her leadership skills as a nurse manager. Those of us at MGH who spent time with them, found it enriching to hear nursing strategies from our Israeli and Palestinian colleagues. Dubovi and Yusef found their experience valuable, not only from a clinical perspective but also in terms of developing their relationship with one another.

This is how they described their visit:

The course helped us to grow in many areas not just in our profession as nurses but also in our relationship. Sister Mary is Palestinian from Jerusalem and Mrs. Shlomit, Israeli from Haifa. We do not know each other before. The first time that we met was in the airport. Nobody in Boston could believe because they notice that we are so close, together we shared the same beautiful comfortable apartment, eating together, going to the hospital together ... so each day our relationship increase, our respect, understanding and love increase, the two of us we believe in our same mission as nurses. To be a nurse means we should nurse everybody without looking at their religion, race, culture, belief...

Shortly after the program ended, a research project I'm working on took me to Israel and Palestine. While there, I was able to visit my new friends. I visited Shlomit in Haifa, my first visit to that beautiful city on the sea. And I spent a lovely afternoon with Sister Mary in Ramallah. It was a wonderful, enriching experience to be able to meet and share time with these two incredible nursing leaders.