

The Brazilian Dermatology Nursing Experience

Susan J. Tofte

I had the wonderful opportunity recently to attend the annual Brazilian Dermatology Convention in São Paulo, Brazil. I was invited to attend because of a research fellow who worked in our lab doing research on atopic dermatitis several years ago. He



knew that I was on the board of the Eczema Association in the United States and wanted to connect me with the Brazilian Eczema Support Group and with the Brazilian Dermatology Nurses Group.

The Brazilian convention was similar to the American Academy of Dermatology with more than 5,000 dermatologists in attendance, but their registration is only open to physicians, residents, and medical students. Sadly nurses and

office staff are not allowed to attend the meeting and, from what I could surmise, nurse practitioners do not exist. The conference was eye-opening and interesting, but there were two special high points for me. The first was meeting with members of the Eczema Support Group and medical professionals who have an interest in this disease. The second was meeting Ms. Maria Helena Mandelbaum, current chairperson of the Dermatology Nurses Group in Brazil.

Addressing Psychological Aspects of Disease

Since I have a passion for atopic dermatitis and the patients who suffer from this disease, I found the meeting with the Brazilian Eczema Support Group to be moving and inspirational. Although we come from different cultures and speak different languages, it was clear that patients with eczema in Brazil suffer with the same problems as patients with eczema in the United States. The patients in this group were enthusiastic and interested in networking with professionals in dermatology to find a cure for this disease. There were at least two clinical psy-

chologists in attendance who are active in the support group. It was impressive to learn that physicians utilize psychologists in clinics to help address the emotional aspects of a chronic disease. Typically U.S. health care providers do not have time to make this type of referral and sometimes fail to recognize the emotional impact atopic dermatitis can have on patients and their families.

Struggling for Recognition

Meeting Ms. Mandelbaum was equally inspiring and educational. The Brazilian Dermatology Nurses Group met during the last week of September for their 2nd Brazilian Congress of Dermatology Nursing. Their focus was "Challenges and Perspectives of Dermatology Nursing; A Specialized View of Holistic (Integral) Care." They entertained topics on wound care, coordinating/integrating health care, emotions and the skin, cosmetics, and the life cycle of the skin. A lecture on the "Autonomy of Nursing" was offered during the convention as well as a Dermatology Nursing Certification exam.

According to Ms. Mandelbaum, the nursing organization currently has approximately 300 members and most if not all of the nurses work in hospitals with inpatients. Although the organization is endorsed by numerous hospitals, I was surprised to learn that they have only one corporate sponsor who provided funding to offset the cost of this conference. I came away feeling so fortunate to be a nurse practitioner in the United States who lives in a state (Oregon) that is progressive and recognizes nurse practitioners and nurses as health care providers and educators. As members of the DNA, we have earned a level of respect that Brazilian nurses are still struggling to find.

Once again I applaud all of you for your commitment to DNA and to your patients. Collectively we share a wealth of knowledge and are fortunate to be known and recognized as experts and champions in dermatology.

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