Midwifery & Health in the Americas:
Marrying Mayan & Western Medicine
Service- Exchange Program – August 2-9, 2014

Health and wellness is critical to both individual growth and the overall success of a community. Hosted by the VCU Institute for Women’s Health in partnership with the Highland Support Project, Partners in Service Program and the Association of Highland Women (AMA) this service/exchange program provides a unique opportunity to spend time in partnership with indigenous midwives and health promoters in Guatemala.

The work of a midwife in Guatemala is an ancient art form, using philosophies and techniques that are virtually unknown in Western medicine. Her practices are founded on the belief that we must achieve and maintain a balance between humans and the environment. In the Highlands of Guatemala, midwives are often the only health care providers for many miles in isolated, rural communities. They are eager for more knowledge of medicine and the opportunity to develop their abilities in order to improve the quality of care given to their patients. According to some official figures, between 40 & 50 percent of all babies in Guatemala are delivered by indigenous midwives.

Health promoters play an integral role in rural villages as they work to differentiate among common illnesses—and refer serious ones before they advance. Mayan medicine is closely tied to spirituality. Illness is regarded as an imbalance and health is understood as a balance between different energies and between the human being and nature as well as the rest of the cosmos. Our service team will work to share our expertise while learning from our hosts, empowering all of us with more knowledge and skills to teach and serve in our communities.

We are offering an opportunity for health professionals, social workers and interested others, from the U.S. to visit Quetzaltenango, Guatemala to participate in this weeklong service/exchange program with a group of Guatemalan midwives, health promoters and community leaders. Together we work with the local women’s cooperative called the Association of Highland Women (AMA) following up on community identified training needs and supporting the villages in their efforts to provide culturally appropriate and sustainable health care services.

Team Leader:
Janett Forte, MSW with the VCU Institute for Women’s Health serves as the team leader and will work closely with HSP staff to recruit participants, organize our group, and develop in-country itineraries and training modules. This is the 4th year she will be leading this trip to Guatemala.

Team Design:
Space is limited to 12 participants. The project is open to VCU students, faculty and staff, community members - anyone interested in women’s health, midwifery, lay community health promoters, traditional medicine, global health and international service.

Trip Details: The standard 8 day trip with all expenses paid includes all in country transportation, food, lodging and translators. The cost is $985.00 plus airfare (around $600 round trip)
Itinerary

The itinerary includes cultural, educational, service and exchange aspects and will be tailored to the interests of the team participants, but do expect time with midwives and health promoters learning about traditional midwifery practices, and medicinal herbs, perhaps lectures from a Mayan Cosmo-vision expert, bone-setters, and spirit guides. We will have time to shop at local indigenous markets in La Antigua Guatemala, which was the colonial Spanish capital of Central America. It is a World Heritage site, and one of the most popular tourist destinations in Guatemala as well as spending a day on Lake Atitlan, considered a ‘jewel’ of the highlands, surrounded by 3 volcanoes.

Information Session

Once applications have been received and acceptance notices sent we will organize an informational meeting in midsummer and together we will develop our final trip itinerary to match the interests and needs of participants. We’ll also answer any questions and provide some context on Guatemala, maternal and child health and our previous work with AMA and the villages in the Highlands.

For more information visit:  
www.amaguate.org/  
www.highlandsupportproject.org or www.partnersinservice.org

Applications are available at: www.womenshealth.vcu.edu

www.womenshealth.vcu.edu/outreach/global/guatemala.html

****** April 25, 2014 is deadline for applications *******

Contact information for questions or to secure an application:
Contact Janett Forte, e-mail: jforte@vcu.edu
Or leave a message for a return call at 804-827-1200