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Land-Based experience with Project Hope 1/71-6/72

I served with Project Hope which is a Health Care project serving developing countries as well as Medically underserved areas in the United States.

I was a member of the first land-based team of Health professionals to serve in Tunis, Tunisia. The Hospital Ship had been based in Tunis for ten months prior to our arrival. At the invitation of the Minister of Health of Tunisia land based teams were recruited to continue projects that had been initiated during the time the hospital ship was in the country.

I served as a nurse-consultant working with a Tunisian counterpart evaluating the nursing care and then developing a program of continuing education for the Nursing staff at Charles Nicole Hospital in Tunis. This was one of the older hospitals and the Ministry of Health felt the staff & facilities were in need of up-grading. The country had been a French protector for one hundred years and had gained their independence in the middle 60's. Many of the French professionals had returned to Europe at that time. The country was in the early stages of developing schools of nursing. The nurse that was being educated at that time was probably on the level of the licensed practical nurse in this country. I also worked with another nurse, a Hope team member, to develop a model nursing unit. This was the hypertension Medical unit. Based on the French system the hospital was a separate building for each specialty with its own central supply, pharmacy, etc.. We assisted in the development of staff to maintain the central supply and pharmacy areas of the unit as well as assisting with improvement of nursing care for the staff. The professional language in the country was French while the native spoken language is Arabic. So, I continued with French courses during my time in the country. I had been prepared with a crash "Berlitz" French course prior to beginning the tour.

Other Hope team members worked in the Hospital laboratory, physical therapy department and Housekeeping. A Central Housekeeping department was successfully established. However, we were unsuccessful in convincing the hospital administration that a Central Supply department would be beneficial to the hospital. A Sanitarian was also in the team but served in the outlying areas of Tunis with the Department of Tunisian Public Health reviewing and developing programs. A physician served as our Medical Director and our office was located in the Ministry of Health. A translator/interpreter was available for conferences or meetings in which a fluent level of French was necessary. Surprisingly, I was able to communicate with my simple level of French and the assistance of my counterpart. I was able to use a simple "street" Arabic with the patients.

During my term in Tunisia the School of Medicine was begun and the first class of Medical

students accepted.

I lived in Tunis and felt the experience to have been the best in relation to becoming acquainted with the people and the culture. Fortunately Tunis was a melting pot with heavy French influence as well as western/eastern european. Many nationalities were working in the Health field as well as education. The Canadians had a large contingent of Medical & nursing professionals in several of the hospitals. The Peace Corps was working in the schools teaching English as a foreign language. I felt the leaders of the country were taking advantage of any assistance that was offered to them.

Project Hope discontinued the Hospital Ship in the early 70's due to expense and age of the vessel. The organization remains actively involved through-out the World and the United States with their Health Care programs which emphasise teaching the local people to develop and eventually assume the responsibility for the operation of the project. Land Based Teams continued to serve in Tunisia until the mid 1980's.