

Students excited, charged by discussions about global health

Ryerson University nursing students Vincent Lee and Jennifer Yoon spoke to fellow students at the AGM about the motivation behind their Model World Health Organization forum earlier this year.

Motion to adjourn. All those in favour...opposed...the motion passes. Session adjourned." These were the words that capped off our fantastic weekend at Harvard University in Boston in February 2007. After five days of debating critical global issues such as peacekeeping, human rights, humanitarian relief, economic development and education, we left the *Harvard National Model United Nations (UN)* excited and charged.

We met students representing different countries from around the world and discussed sustainable solutions to population growth and democratic vs. military states during emergency relief. Delegates – some from as far away as Venezuela, Germany and China – brought a mixture of social, economical, historical, and political ideologies, drawing from their educational backgrounds in art, history, politics, economics, and business administration.

Since most of the student's participating came to the event without a science or health background, this made it difficult for them to debate issues of policy and global change from a health perspective. Given our education in nursing and our backgrounds in science, we were able to bring factors such as social determinants

of health, community health and patient centred care into the debates. It was these perspectives that caught the attention of many delegates and changed the tone of discussions to include a well-rounded health focus.

With the experience of Harvard behind us, we started thinking about organizing a forum of our own – but one modeled on the work of the World Health Organization. We agreed it was important to share some of our experiences with fellow nursing students. We wanted to promote the inclusion and participation of all nursing students in the conference, engaging them in discussions of politics and policy on many different levels. As nursing students and future nurses, we work in a collaborative health-care environment that does its best to advocate for change and the betterment of health for patients and the system. With this collaboration in mind, we set out to mirror the *Model UN* experience to reflect nursing and health-care issues. We sent out a call to health and community health service program students, and the response was great.

Our first *Model WHO* forum took place in January 2008 at Ryerson University. It was quite a novel experience and very successful; student registrants

actively participated, continually improved their level of argument, and learned from their peers. We discussed issues of bioterrorism and the demilitarization of child soldiers, and gave students an opportunity to discuss how social, environmental, economic and political systems in each UN country play a role in how health is delivered to its citizens. In the end, we created a draft resolution calling on UN nations to implement financial and trade sanctions on countries unwilling to comply with WHO recommendations that address issues of bioterrorism and child soldiers.

Our guest speakers from the College of Nurses of Ontario, York University, *Médicins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders*, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care pushed students to think about ideas of integration, innovation and collaborative work. Our student delegates were ecstatic after the simulation ended. They told us that it helped them understand how the needs of different countries must be worked out multilaterally, and that change does not happen overnight. They were thrilled to have the Minister of Health observing discussions, motions, and the passing of the final draft resolution. They said they hoped to see more *Model WHO* forums in the future so all students can come to appreciate how being involved affects change around them.

We hope our leadership during this initiative has helped more students understand issues of global health, and the role they play in contributing to finding resolutions to health concerns that stretch beyond our own backyards. **RN**

Vincent Chapland Lee and Jennifer Yoon are past president and president's council (08-09), respectively, with RNAO's Nursing Students of Ontario (NSO) interest group.

New RNAO membership categories include 'associates' and 'friends'

After considerable debate and discussion, voting delegates at this year's AGM approved the creation of two new categories of membership with the association.

Effective November of this year, for \$80, RNs practising outside Ontario who are not registered with the College of Nurses of Ontario (including those practising interna-

tionally), may become 'associates.' For the same fee, any person who wishes to support the work of RNAO, but does not meet the criteria for 'member' or 'associate' (including nursing students studying outside Ontario) may become a 'friend of RNAO.'

These newest membership categories reflect RNAO's increased profile beyond provincial and national borders, and

provide the association with an opportunity to share its knowledge with individuals not previously eligible to join.

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