



ASPAN

American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses

Message from the President

Reach Out – Beyond the Boundaries of the United States Alcance Fuera – Más Allá de las Fronteras de los Estados Un

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ASPAN President 2002-2003

In May, 2002, I received an email from Lic. Jovita Paez Armenteros, the President of the Cuban Nursing Society (CNS), inviting me to lecture at the 10th Congress of the Cuban Nursing Society and the First Colloquium on Natural and Traditional Medicine, co-sponsored by the following organizations: Cuban Nursing Society, Ministry of Public Health of the Republic of Cuba, Pan-American Federation of Nursing Professionals (FEPPEN), Pan-American Sanitary Bureau / World Health Organization (PAHO / WHO), Latin-American Association of Nursing Schools and Faculties (ALADEFE), National Center of Medical Science Information, National Council of Scientific Societies of Health, and the National Center of Prevention and Education for Health. I was asked to present "Trends in Perianesthesia Nursing." I thought this would be a wonderful opportunity for ASPAN to reach out beyond the boundaries of the U. S. to share information about our specialty and, most importantly, about our organization. I also thought, "I already have a passport, so travel arrangements should be pretty easy." (Little did I know that I was in for a very eye-opening experience.) So I happily accepted the invitation to speak at the Cuban Nursing Congress.

I started making travel arrangements and quickly discovered U. S. citizens must have special permission from the government to travel to Cuba. I also found out my request to the U. S. government needed to include a letter of invitation from the CNS, which I proceeded to obtain. Then I sent an official letter requesting permission to attend the Congress to the Licensing Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Department of the Treasury in Washington DC. Now everything was pending receipt of the official permission license.

On September 25th, I received my license, giving permission to travel to the Cuban Nursing Congress along with an outline of specific regulations and an expiration date of October 19th, the day immediately following the end of the Congress. I then notified the President of the Cuban Nursing Society that I did receive permission from the U.S. Government and now had to get permission from the Cuban Government.

In the beginning of October, I contacted an organization in Washington DC who would go to the Cuban Consulate on my behalf to obtain a Cuban visa granting me permission to attend the Cuban Nursing Congress. After about a week, I was told the Cuban Consulate would need a few weeks to approve it, to which I responded, "In a few weeks, the Cuban Nursing Congress would be over!" I emailed the President of the CNS, explaining my dilemma. Migdalia Luna, Professional Congress Organizer for the CNS, emailed me back, suggesting I contact a travel agency they have worked with before (Marazul Charters in northern New Jersey). I called, speaking with a travel agent who said she would help me make arrangements to obtain a Cuban visa, as well as my travel and lodging arrangements and assured me she would do everything possible to help me attend the Cuban Nursing Congress.

I was getting nervous as the date of the Congress was fast approaching. I was attending the national meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) immediately before the Cuban Nursing Congress. Prior to leaving for the ASA conference I was able to finalize my travel plans to Havana, but I still did not have a Cuban visa. Three days later the travel agent told me my Cuban visa was approved, and would be waiting at the check in gate in Miami.

On the morning of October 15th, I flew to Miami, where I expected to pick up my charter flight to Cuba. (There are no direct flights on commercial airlines to Cuba from the U. S. and only a few limited charter flights.) Amazingly my Cuban visa was waiting at the gate. Once completing the check-in process, I proceeded to the waiting area for the flight. I thought, "I think this is really going to happen." I boarded my plane and arrived in Havana, Cuba forty-five minutes later. With no idea of what to expect, I was nervous going through the inspection on arrival in Cuba. The only question I was asked was, "You are traveling alone?" He found this suspicious but I explained I was there to speak at the Cuban Nursing Congress, and he stamped my Cuban visa, allowing me to pass through the gate.

Once there I was surprised to see in attendance nurses from 25 different countries, including Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Columbia, Mexico, Spain, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, El Salvador, France, China, Italy, Panama, Peru, Canada, Uruguay, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, and the U.S. The opening ceremonies included cultural dance and flags from all the participating countries. Since most spoke Spanish, my presentation was simultaneously translated into Spanish, and I answered questions with the help of a translator. Several nurses asked if ASPAN would be interested in collaborating on some research projects, to which I answered, "Sure!", and provided ASPAN's contact information. The other presentations included current nursing research, reorganization of nursing organizations and challenges facing nursing today. It was clear that nurses in many other countries are facing the same issues as we are.

Via a translator, the conference organizers gave me an address, and asked me to meet them there that evening for "cultural night." This is a part of the Congress when the group comes together to celebrate each of their cultures. Each country is announced, and their conference attendees go up to the stage, and do a little dancing specific to their culture/country. When they announced the U.S. I proceeded up to the stage, alone! Obviously I was the only U.S. attendee, but I could not do any cultural dance since the music was Frank Sinatra, "New York New York"! I laughed and said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot dance by myself to that song, but I will say a few words." While on stage I spoke to the group via a translator and said "Thank you for being so kind and making me feel so welcome! Your organization is wonderful and proves that nursing crosses all boundaries and nurses can overcome any barriers that are put up between us!" The audience did give me a round of applause!

On October 17th I traveled home from a very unique and rewarding experience, which provided our organization another opportunity to reach out to nurses from so many other countries. This is an exciting example that further exemplifies ASPAN's continued efforts to reach out internationally and share our commitment to perianesthesia nursing. Although the planning and preparation for this journey was not easy, the potential rewards made every moment worth it. When asked would I do it all again---I must say ABSOLUTELY! Take a chance and reach out, even beyond the boundaries of the U.S.—the information, ideas and experiences you share with others, and they share with you, will enrich your life and will return to you ten-fold.idos.