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Nursing Alumna Visits Middle East to Train Cardiac Healthcare Professionals

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – When an opportunity arose in the summer of 2010 to travel to northern Iraq and train health professionals at a local hospital, Molly King '03, an alumna of Illinois Wesleyan School of Nursing, jumped at the chance.



Molly King '03

In June of 2010 King traveled to northern Iraq with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Samaritan's Purse in conjunction with For Hearts & Souls (FHAS).

In Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, she helped to provide training to nurses specializing in post-operative nursing management of congenital heart disease repairs at the Sulaymaniyah Center for Heart Diseases. King spent 10 weeks at the hospital as a representative of FHAS in conjunction with Samaritan's Purse, a not-for-profit organization funding the trip. During her time there, King focused on developing a curriculum addressing the post-operative care needs of cardiac patients and implementing it through bedside teaching and lectures. At first, this proved to be a difficult task.

"Of course language was a barrier," said King. "A lot of the medical staff [understood] some English, but many did not, which is quite interesting considering that nursing education is done in English because there is no technical or scientific vocabulary in the Kurdish language."

In addition to the language barrier, King found that asking questions was viewed as challenging authority and, therefore, culturally inappropriate. "I probably had the hardest time with this because in the context of pediatric heart surgery, I could not respect that tradition when patients, especially children, were being harmed." Ultimately, King overcame these challenges by gaining the respect of the hospital staff through her persistence in teaching.



*King in Mongolia with a child
recovering from surgery*

King first worked with FHAS in 2007 – a time of travel for her – when she worked with pediatric cardiac patients in Mongolia. There she assisted with complex cardiac surgeries and post-operative care for children and ventured into the Mongolian wilderness searching for children with congenital heart disease. According to King, the most rewarding part of the trip was “giving children [suffering from congenital heart disease] a chance at a full and productive life.” Since her first visit to Mongolia, King has returned three times.

She also spent time abroad in 2007 working with Mercy Ships, the largest nongovernmental hospital ship in the world.

When working toward her degree at IWU, King had an idea she wanted to travel, but “it never occurred to me that nursing could take me to the far corners of the world to teach!” Upon graduating from Illinois Wesleyan, she accepted a job offer at a St. Louis hospital, where she served as a Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) nurse. King recently completed a dual masters degree in public health and nursing from Emory University and works as a part-time nurse at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. She still looks for opportunities to travel internationally and to help children in need.

Although King is unsure of what the future holds for her, she is certain of one thing, “I definitely plan to continue to do this kind of work. Now that I have finished graduate school, I am looking for ways to do international work more full-time.” In her fight for the betterment of children’s lives, she has traveled from California to Pennsylvania, and across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. King’s passion for nursing and desire to help children has no boundaries.

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