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Internationalization of curriculum is promoted by many universities and in responding to this agenda, international clinical experiences provide an opportunity to strengthen and refine communication skills. Griffith University has developed an international placement program to Laos where final year nursing and midwifery students provide primary health care clinics to villagers with limited access to any health care. Griffith students participating in this international placement are provided with supportive preparation, including strategies for working with translators and an introduction to Lao culture and language.

The students travel to remote villages in rural Laos, where almost no English is spoken. Initially, the language barrier seems insurmountable; however students quickly learn the value of using non-verbal communication strategies in the context of basic assessment, as they observe visual cues, facial expressions and body language. A further opportunity to cultivate communication skills lies in students' responding to the need for health education and health promotion for people with limited health literacy. The placement focuses on building relationships and trust with community members by including Lao health workers, villager leaders and translators in the planning and delivery of these client-centred education sessions to ensure information is communicated at an appropriate level. Students are immersed in the culture, living in local home-stays, further developing their understanding of village structure and social conventions and learning new ways to communicate through interaction with their 'families'. The students gain increasing confidence in their ability to navigate their way through this new culture and are supported throughout the placement by experienced academic supervisors, Lao translators and local health workers.

On their return to Australia, students demonstrate increased confidence and identify strategies to incorporate their refined communication skills into their nursing practice. This attribute will be invaluable as new graduates in providing appropriate patient-centred care for clients from culturally diverse backgrounds.