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The Lived Experiences of Doing OT in Malaysia & Ghana from the Perspective of a Practitioner & Global Citizen Living in the U.S.: 3 Snapshots into Culture

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Introduction: Occupational therapists working abroad in communities of marginalized populations are called to be both professionals and citizens (de Souza)-not only offering valuable knowledge/skills, but also taking time to learn and consider cultural aspects of the community for effective practice. In order to participate in enabling better futures for marginalized populations through OT, it is necessary to explore our own cultural biases, both personally and collectively as a profession. This poster aims to reveal and describe the lived experiences of doing OT in Malaysia and Ghana from the lens of a practitioner and global citizen living in the U.S.

Objectives: To share lived experiences of one practitioner's journey of participating in international OT work in diverse practice settings/populations and simulate interest in new cultural contexts as a way to expand innovative and reflective practice beyond the scope of traditional OT.

Description/Report: The themes of multicultural competence, empowerment and collaboration embedded in these international OT lived experiences will be presented. Additionally, diverse cultural expressions and OT delivery will be compared and contrasted through 3 lives of children with disabilities in their respective countries of Malaysia, Ghana, and the U.S.A.

Results/Discussion: The results suggest that the experience of participating in volunteer international OT work is not only rewarding, but challenging as it requires personal reflection, bias trimming, and practicing with limited resources. This lived experience encourages us to explore practical and culturally safe ways in which we can take action.

Conclusion: Engaging in international OT work for the marginalized is an ideal occupation that facilitates personal/professional growth, self-fulfillment, and allows for rich cultural exchanges to produce new possibilities & hope for both practitioner and client through collaborative effort.

Contribution: Through understanding the lived experience of one OT's multicultural journey abroad and locally, the hope is that OTs will explore the call of this ethical challenge "to push themselves outside the comfortable but invisible confines of their culture and class to attempt an accurate understanding of their clients' worldview and situation" (McGruder) so as to engage in reflective practice, increase cultural competence, and empower through collaboration, the disempowered.