



United States Government Donates Equipment to Nursing Simulation Laboratory of the University of Belize

Belmopan City, Belize, 22 November 2023 (PAHO/WHO) – The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW), with funding support from the United States Government donated a variety of equipment to the Nursing Simulation Laboratory of the University of Belize.

From the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, a country's health system must build the capacity of healthcare workers to respond to health emergencies efficiently and effectively. Thus, various countries have been investing in human resources for health, especially the nursing workforce. This included enhancing nursing academic programs in the Caribbean where nurses can develop the skills to prepare them for the workforce and any future pandemics.

"Nurses are the foundation and the backbone of the healthcare system, and they are most often the first person the patient encounters," said Dr. Beth King, Medical Officer at the US Embassy. "I'm really proud to see so much focus on nursing education. If we can provide them with a good foundation and tools, they (nurses) will find a way to succeed and do the best they can for their patients, their families, and their communities."

In November 2022, Belize was one of the countries selected to participate in a pilot project where PAHO's collaborating Center at the University of North Carolina as well as the University of the West Indies campus in Barbados assessed the nursing education system in the country, including the School of Nursing at the University of Belize. The team reviewed the academic curricula and inspected classrooms, simulation labs, libraries, computer rooms, practicum sites and other areas to strengthen nursing education in the country. They also spoke to nursing educators and clinical nursing instructors, nursing and midwifery associations and regulatory bodies, health facility administrators and health professionals, and the MoHW, among others.

"PAHO is very pleased to have provided this technical cooperation to the School of Nursing, University of Belize to help to strengthen nursing

education in the country in a sustainable way,” said Dr. Karen Lewis-Bell, PAHO/WHO Representative in Belize. “Working with our collaborating centers on nursing also helped to effect positive changes in the nursing curriculum and to strengthen the practical component of the training. We wish to thank the government of the United States of America for their funding support in this effort.”

This donated equipment came as an additional component from that assessment that will allow nursing students to be placed in practical situations with equipment used in the health sector. The much-needed equipment included those that are essential for diagnosis and treatment such as electrocardiogram machine, aneroid sphygmomanometer, fetal Stethoscope, nebulizer machine, vaginal speculums, instrument tray stainless steel with lid, overbed table, mobile-based exam lamp, as well as those for teaching, to include laptops, smart LED portable projectors, wall-mounted projectors and portable stereo speakers.

“There is no doubt the value that we should have on our nurses,” said Mr. Vincent Palacio. “We are building this particular program. In a few months, we won’t have a faculty of health sciences, we will have a College of Health Sciences where the nurses’ program will be much bigger. Again, thank you for the generous donation and we will make the most of it in our program.”

Additionally, with low retention and high turnover rates continuing to be a major cause of the shortages of nurses in the Caribbean region, Belize and the Ministry of Health and Wellness hope these pieces of equipment will enhance the University of Belize’s Nursing Program by building the capacity of the current nursing students and equip them with the necessary clinical skills and competencies to face the real-world challenges of the Belize health system.

“It is a privilege to stand here witnessing this very important donation and I want to thank our partners,” said Hon. Kevin Bernard, Minister of the MoHW in Belize. “The Ministry is constantly looking at how we can retain our nurses, but at the same time ensure they keep up to pace with the necessary skillset that are needed to ensure that we can continue to deliver quality service to our Belizean people and how best it is when we can have our very own University of Belize provide that necessary training and skillset.”

PAHO/WHO continues to collaborate with partners like the United States Government to support the preparedness and capacity of Belize’s health system.