



The Breakthrough to Nursing column presents ideas and perspectives about the importance of cultural diversity in nursing.

By Devyn K. Denton

## Cost vs. Price of the American Dream



What would you do for \$1.92 an hour? When I asked the question of my eleven-year old son, he replied, “Not much of anything.” Would you work all day in temperatures with heat indexes in the mid 100s, deplorable living conditions, very little food, and no medical care?

Migrant workers often work in these very conditions and their plight has led some to label them “seasonal slaves.” A farmer near my community once told fellow students that he and his workers had a love/hate relationship: “I love to see them work, but I hate to pay them.”

Migrant and seasonal farm workers do jobs that we in the U.S. generally think of as “beneath” us; yet these workers do it for about \$8,000 a year, often working in poor conditions, with employers subtracting food, transportation, and other “expenses” from their wages (Schlosser, 2005).

In Oklahoma, we have a booming migrant and seasonal farm worker population, that sometimes – like all other workers and their families – get hurt or sick. Unlike them, when we get sick we can make a phone call to a doctor, get an appointment, get medicine to correct the problem, and then take time off work to heal. If we don’t like a particular physician, we can flip through the phone book and find someone else.

For most migrant and seasonal farm workers, neither safe nor quality health care is readily available. Choices generally include low-income or free clinics for medical care. Many workers have valid reasons not to go to these clinics: communication and language problems; transportation issues, including lack thereof; and fear. Fear that they could be reported and then deported.

So what does this have to do with you as a nursing student? Well, more than you think! As nurses, we

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will be entrusted with patient advocacy and we'll be constantly challenged to practice with cultural competence.

Are you able to look past your political affiliation, put down all of your preconceived notions and get down to the important business of understanding that the medical isolation of these migrant and seasonal farm workers affect us all in one way or another?

At the 2007 NSNA Annual Convention in Anaheim, CA, the House of Delegates passed a resolution In Support of Increasing Awareness Among Nursing Students Concerning the Health Disparities of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and Their Families. (To read the entire resolution, go to [www.nsna.org](http://www.nsna.org) and click on Publications, then Resolutions.)

That was a great **first step**.

**Step Two** Get involved. Find a local clinic that needs your help. Perhaps your chapter can hold a "drive" and get extra supplies or money that the clinic can use to serve its existing clientele and perhaps even more people.

**Step Three** Do a bit of research. Find out if the population you are serving has specific traditions or cultural practices and do your best to learn about them. This will help you be the best health care professional possible to your patient.

**Step Four** Know that comfort is key. If we can bring comfort to families that generally get very little, we can become our own personal heroes and make a huge difference in our communities one family at a time.

The provision of health care for migrant farm workers is an important area for nurse advocacy. Get involved and see what you can do to improve the health status of this underserved population.

Healthy People 2010 is a resource regarding health disparities:

[www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)  
[www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)  
[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

## references

Schlosser, Eric. (2005, April 6). "A Side Order of Human Rights." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/06/opinion/06schlosser.html?pagewanted=print&position>