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Ruth Downing '04/'06

Major: Nursing/MSN Family Nurse Practitioner

In 1999, Ruth was introduced to the field of forensic nursing while attending a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) training. Since then, she has devoted her career to educating healthcare and legal professionals to work with victims of violence.

"When I graduated from Otterbein, I founded Forensic Healthcare Consulting," Ruth said. "This business provided a venue to provide education and consulting services to healthcare and legal professionals with the goal of integrating health and justice and improving the care of victims of violence."

For the past seven years, Ruth has been involved in county, state, and national efforts to address violence in many communities. She has provided trainings for nurses, physicians, social workers, advocates, emergency medical services, law enforcement, lawyers, school nurses and teachers, and medical, nursing, law and criminal justice students, to educate them on how to properly evaluate and document injuries as a result of interpersonal violence.

In 2007, Ruth was invited by the International Justice Mission to provide education on evidence collection for sexual assault patients to healthcare and law enforcement professionals in Huánuco, Peru. "I have returned to Peru each year with a team from The River Church Community in San Jose, California, to expand these multidisciplinary trainings and support the local Peruvian human rights organization, Paz y Esperanza, as they seek justice for their women and children that have been abused," Ruth said.

Ruth has also collaborated with a forensic nurse colleague at the University of Tennessee and the president of the university in Huánuco to provide specialized trainings for forensic physicians, nurses and lawyers in Peru, which resulted in a partnership between the universities, Ruth said. "As a result of the trainings in Huánuco, this small Andean community, in one of the poorest areas of Peru, now has the highest prosecution rate for child sexual abuse in all of Peru," Ruth said.

Ruth said issues of interpersonal violence have become so important to her because, after more than 20 years in the profession, she realized the major role nurses play in caring for victims of violence. "Nurses want to make a difference, and I found that in addressing the medico-legal needs of my patients, I could truly make a difference in their lives and help them seek justice," she said. "My goal is to break the cycle of violence wherever I can, thus improving the quality of life for my patients, their families, and our community."

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