

# 2015 Russia Transcultural Trip

## Journal 1

By Miranda Matheny and Jenna Capriotti

Today we visited the Vladimir Regional Hospital. When walking up to the entrance of the hospital it was a different appearance than what a hospital would look like in the U.S. The medical vehicles that the U.S. uses tend to be more modern makes along with the appearance of the hospital. It was also different to see that smoking is allowed in such close proximity to a medical facility whereas in the U.S. it is not.

We visited with the head nurse and physician of the hospital, and they shared their history. A question was asked whether nurses work for or with physicians and the answer was unclear. The head nurse explained that they do work with them, but they do not have very many privileges which is unlike nurses in the U.S.



Vladimir Regional Hospital



Operating Room

The tour was next and our first visit was with the admitting department where patients go to get diagnosed before they are admitted to a specific floor. On each floor or building they had a different specialty, such as endocrinology. The head nurse also informed us that the nurses at the hospital are down by 10-15%, and therefore, the nurses have to work extra-long shifts at this time.

Our next visit was at the labor and delivery unit. It was unique to find that there were no husbands with their wives on the maternity floor, and women waiting for C-sections were all in the same room. They even gave us a tour of the surgical suite that was sterile. The healthcare workers are much more relaxed about regulations and privacy regulations like we have in the U.S. They showed us the lab and clinic where pregnant women come for tests and checkups to prevent any complications. When asking about the source of pain medication during labor, the physician told us that the physician normally chooses if a patient will receive an epidural, otherwise they will have a drug-free labor. Another difference that was noted is that labor patient's move to various rooms throughout the birthing process whereas in the U.S. we like to keep the mother in one room the whole time, if at all possible.

If a child does not have parents or was abandoned, the hospital will take care of them if they are sick. Once the sickness is cleared they will be moved to the baby house or the orphanage. If a child does have parents the mother will stay with them in a room the whole length of stay free of charge.



Babies in the Labor and Delivery Unit

Upon leaving the hospital we walked outside to the side of the building for them to show us one last thing. They opened up a metal door to find a small baby bed inside.



Safe Drop Off Box

This was a safe drop off box for parents to put their baby if they did not want to care for it, with no questions asked.

There was a note inside that the parents take when they leave their baby. Fortunately, the box has never been used since it was installed three years ago. When the door shuts an alarm sounds to notify the healthcare workers inside to check the “baby box”. The U.S. also has safe drop off places for people who are unable to care for their babies.

The hospital in Vladimir, Russia was a great experience, and I learned so many details about the healthcare system and the way they run their hospital. It was very interesting to see the difference between Russia and the U.S.!

## Journal 2

By Miranda Matheny and Jenna Capriotti

We went to the Blood Transfusion Center today and spoke with Dametri, who was the physician. It was evident Dametri was very proud of his facility and he was eager to teach us about what he does. This place is a blood donor and storage facility all in one for the region of Vladimir. It was incredible!



Blood Transfusion Center

The first thing that happens in the process is paper work, which can be done online ahead of time. Appointments are usually called in, but people can also walk in. Then they are assessed and asked a few questions. After they are cleared they give blood in an area like what we would, but the difference was that they had a row for plasma donors, blood donors, and whole blood donors. This is the time at which the blood vial samples were attained for testing. It was cool to see that they have donors receiving a bag of normal saline to replace what they are losing and they also get two days paid vacation time for their donation from their work by law. Additionally, they receive the equivalent to ten U.S. dollars to put towards food after they leave or they are given a coupon to lower restaurant prices for food.

The blood is then centrifuged and the staff placed the layered blood bag into a squeeze clamp, and then would stop the flow and change the outgoing bags when necessary. There was a layer for erythrocytes, plasma, and platelets and leukocytes/interferons.



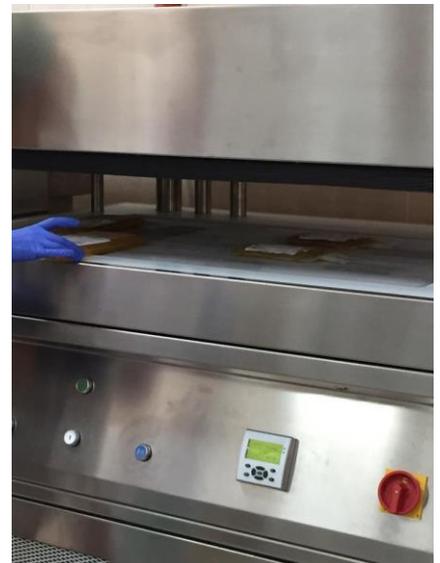
Separation of Blood

Dametri informed us that once a Russian citizen had donated forty liters of blood or sixty liters of plasma, they received special recognition from their government. Those who achieve this status are given lower prices on everything for the rest of their lives, mostly in terms of

food prices and other such daily items. They also have the right to receive their health care first, so they do not have to wait in line if they want to go in for medical treatment. As far as I am aware, the Red Cross only gives those who donate thirty gallons a pin. It is quite a bit different.

The lab tests done on the vials are all of the same ones that the U.S. uses, but there was one small difference - the U.S. does not test for syphilis due to the fact that it has been proven that it cannot survive the freezing process, but the Russians are still required to test for it by law. If a blood type came up positive for diseases, such as Hepatitis C or HIV or HPV, the facility would send off the blood bag to a testing facility and then recommend that the patient go see their doctor. They would not actually say what was going on, but just direct them to be seen by their physician.

The freezing process of the plasma was interesting to see. To freeze the plasma there was a paper-press like machine that froze the plasma in seconds while flattening it. Then there are the actual freezers containing the plasma. We were told that the facility will keep plasma for a six month period due to testing, but it can be used years after the freeze date. There were a few new machines to test out that supposedly had the ability to freeze and preserve erythrocytes. At the current time they must be used within four weeks of the donation date. This new machine was used to freeze Rh-negative blood types and store them for up to fifteen years!



Plasma Freezer

Lastly, we were shown the refrigerator for the blood types. We were surprised to see a lot of O+ and other Rh+ groups. There were a lot less negative blood types. There were only two containers of O- blood and then the only one container of AB- blood. We were told that the facility held on to the blood and then the hospitals of the city would call and put in a request of what blood types/plasma they were in need of. Only then did the blood go to the hospital for use and even there the blood bag has a label indicating it may be infectious.

## **Journal #1- First Day and visiting the Medical College**

**By: Sarah Anderson and Bridget Good**

After what seemed like an eternity on a plane, we finally arrived in Moscow on Wednesday, May 13! Our interpreter, Nina, and one of our hosts, Olga, were waiting for us and immediately wanted a group picture. I was so impressed that Nina memorized our names and faces. We proceeded to head toward Vladimir, where we would be staying for the next two weeks.

On the ride to Vladimir, we began to learn Russian, including two songs. Although we were not very good, Nina assured us with practice we would improve. After a long bus ride, we arrived in a fairly urban city with lots of people walking outside and many shops and cafes along the streets. We had our first dinner with Nina and our hosts and then were able to go with our hosts to our new “home” for two weeks. Our hosts were so accommodating and welcoming to us; we could not have asked for anything more. We then were able to rest up for our first full day in Vladimir.

On Thursday May 14, we went to the Vladimir Medical College. Unlike at Illinois State University, the college was a free standing building with no other entities such as Business, Education, etc. close by; it was not a campus but rather a college in itself. Therefore, all of the resources



Vladimir Medical College

were available within the college. In this sense, it resembled a Junior High School building with classrooms, offices, and Sim Lab all in one building - how convenient!

Everyone was so welcoming towards us. Having tea and sweets is a custom in Russia; therefore, we were taken to Tamara’s office, who is the head of the Dental and Specialty Nursing Departments. After tea, we were given a brief tour. We noticed they used mannequins just like in the U.S. Along with having a wonderful orientation with the

students and staff where they talked about their college and education, we then had the opportunity to personally talk with some of the teachers about their curriculum, which was very similar to Illinois State. I found it very interesting the college taught not only nursing, but also other specialties such as dentistry. We asked what their hardest courses were and shared a laugh when they said, “all of them” since we can certainly relate. However, students specifically said the biology, chemistry, and pathology were the hardest courses – again, very similar to Illinois State!

After visiting the college, we went to explore the city we would be staying in. We saw cathedrals, museums, landscapes and monuments. It was truly a breathtaking experience looking over the vast land of Russia at birds eye view.



The breathtaking view looking over Vladimir region of Russia.

Russians are very knowledgeable about their history. We found this very admirable, because many Americans do not know about our nation’s history.



First pharmacy in Vladimir.

We ventured into the central part of Vladimir and learned about the Golden Gate. This monument was symbolic of Russia’s victory during the Mongol invasion. The actual Golden Gate was taken down but the arch still stands today and two towers were built along the sides to help reinforce the overall structure.

We had another beautiful view of Vladimir, Russia atop one of hills next to the Golden Gate. We continued our touring through Vladimir and saw the very first pharmacy. The pharmacy had a cylinder structure in order to have windows on all sides. This way, the pharmacy was able to get natural light and was able to grow specimens to prescribe correct medications. Soon it was time to venture home and prepare for our many more upcoming adventures in Russia.



Our view atop the hill. The white building is the side of the famous Golden Gate.

## **Journal entry #2 - Excursion of Vladimir Hospitals & Dinner in the Countryside** **By: Bridget Good and Sarah Anderson**

Today, we took an excursion of the hospitals in Vladimir- which was VERY eye opening. The main regional hospital that we visited was very large and had many different departments, just like many of our hospitals in the U.S. It was interesting to learn from the head nurse, Galena, about how nursing was conducted in Russia.

To begin, nurses are mostly female. It was a nice experience for our male students to explain why they chose to go into nursing because the nurses loved to hear their perspective. Another big difference was hearing about healthcare payment and how that worked. In Russia, healthcare is free to all who need it. Of course, this is something that we do not see in the U.S., so it was a great learning experience.



Vladimir's main regional hospital.



Some MCN students touring through the Maternity Hospital's NICU. (No privacy violations were made through this photo.)

After visiting the main hospital, we walked across the lot to the Maternity Hospital. Here, physicians and nurses see and care for women throughout all stages of pregnancy. There were different wards for check-ups, labor, delivery, and post-partum. There was also a unit for babies who needed to be in intensive care. The head physicians of the maternity hospital explained to us that most of the deliveries at this hospital were natural deliveries, and that physicians were the main deciders in whether or not a mom would receive pain meds for her labor and/or delivery. We were shown the operating room where cesarean sections were performed. What really surprised us was when they told us how many deliveries happened here each day - about 20 per day! We couldn't imagine having 20 babies being delivered each day, but how miraculous! The healthcare

team promoted breastfeeding for the baby and kept close eyes on mom within the first hours postpartum for any complications. As stated before, this hospital also had a version of a NICU. We saw several babies in this unit and were able to learn about some of the practices that were being performed for these kiddos.

After the maternity hospital, we were able to spend a little bit of time at the neighboring children's hospital. This hospital was very large and treated a great range of illnesses and diseases. There were many different wards and children running everywhere - it was so sweet! We could really tell the compassion the nurses and physicians at this hospital had for these children. They were so excited to tell us about their advancements and accomplishments. We toured the neonate section of this hospital, and one of my favorite things about this unit was the large wall that contained pictures of all of the "graduates" from this intensive care unit. There were pictures of babies who were sick who have grown up to be happy and healthy and many of whom still come back to visit the hospital. Although we couldn't spend much time at the children's hospital, we still were able to learn so much.

Once we left the hospitals, we headed out to Tamara's son's countryside home. His house is tucked in the middle of surrounding forests and has beautiful scenery. This incredible log home has a spacious kitchen and beautiful loft. Our wonderful hosts spent the entire day preparing a picnic lunch for us that included an assortment of meats and sides, and everything was so good! Did we forget to mention that this day was also Melissa Moody's birthday? At dinner, we celebrated with a toast and some delicious Russian tart that our hosts picked out for the special day! We then spent the dinner sharing stories, singing, and laughing along to everyone's company. It was a day to remember!



After our wonderful tour (and yummy tea time) at the Children's Hospital.



Celebrating Transcultural Coordinator Melissa Moody's birthday!

## Journal 1 - Russia: Where everyday is never the same and always an adventure By Ben Stuff and David Baker

When traveling to Russia none of us knew what to expect. By the time we arrived to Domodedovo we had been up for almost 25 hours. After getting checked through customs we were greeted by Nina and Olga. It was nice to have such a warm greeting.

We then went out to the bus and met our driver, Serg. On our drive to Vladimir, Nina taught us different Russian words like *privet* and *paka*. She also taught us two songs in Russian.

When I imagined Vladimir, I thought it might be about the size of a town, but I was mistaken and was amazed at the size of Vladimir and how it was a huge city.

Nina and Olga then took us to Krendael or also known as “small pretzel bread.” During dinner we met Miranda and Jenna’s hostess, Olga A. We also celebrated Ben’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday with them at the café. We took Sarah and Bridget to their hostesses flat, and on the way Nina pointed out that there had just been a celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary



Krendael Kafe.

of the fall of fascism. She pointed out many decorative signs. Ben and I were then driven to our host’s flat. We then met Serg who would be our host for the two weeks. Serg surprised Ben with a cake to celebrate his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I thought that was very thoughtful.

Every morning Ben and I woke up to the wonderful smell of Serg’s homemade cooking. He made us breakfast and some nights he made us dinner. Every meal he



L-R: Bridget Good, Miranda Matheny, Sarah Anderson, Ben Stuff, Jenna Capriotti, David Baker

prepared was delicious, and it was fun to watch the Russian TV with him before leaving on our daily excursions.

On Thursday, we went to Vladimir Medical College. We met Tamara who was the hostess for Melissa during the trip. Tamara is the director of the nurse practitioner program there. We had some snacks before meeting the students. Faculty of the college gave presentations about the college. The students go through many clinicals and have mandatory physical activity. The students are also involved in many activities like volunteering, dancing, and theater. Each of us had to present a slide about our hobbies and family. The students were able to ask us questions, and I thought that was very cool. I loved how much we got to interact with the students. Our group then went back to Tamara's office and we had tea.

After visiting the college we went on an excursion of Vladimir. Our first stop was at the Cathedral of Saint Demetrius. This cathedral wowed me because of its intricate architecture and very detailed designs. We stood under the dove, and Olga A. told us that if you stand there then you would be blessed.

We went to a museum where we learned about the history of Vladimir during World War II. After this we then went to see the Golden Gates - the entrance to Vladimir.

We visited Saint George Cathedral, and saw beautiful frescos and relics of Saint George. When walking out of the Cathedral we learned that we were right next to Vladimir's first pharmacy.

Olga A. and Nina then took us to one of the most beautiful views of the Cathedral of Assumption. In the light it was magnificent. We went through the park and went shopping. After that we had dinner at a café, and then returned to Serg's flat.

On Friday, we went to the Vladimir Regional Hospital. We first got to meet the head nurse of the hospital and then the head physician. The head nurse took us to the



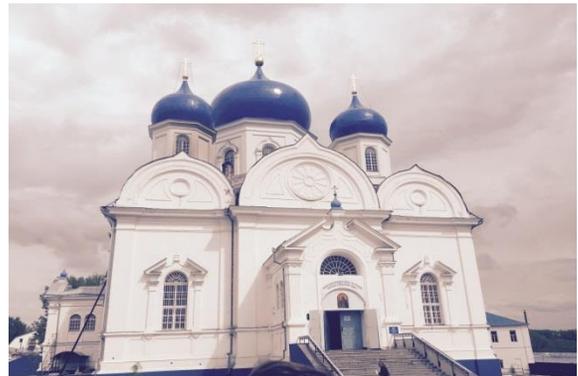
Cathedral of Saint Demetrius

general surgical floor where we got to see how the nurses worked. We also got to see how they did their charting and the different surgical areas.

We visited the ear, nose, and throat floor where we saw the equipment and surgical rooms that were used. The next building we went to was the Prenatal Center. Before entering the floors we had to put on booties, a gown, and hair net. The head of the Prenatal Center then showed us around. It was such an awesome opportunity to get to see the newborns and what they do to take care of them. We also got to see how laboring moms were taken care of and the surgical room for C-section births. They also took us to see how everything is sterilized.

We walked over to the Regional Children Clinical Hospital where we met the head of the Children's Clinic and we had tea with her. She then showed us a children's floor and I loved how unique it was to families in that the mother has the opportunity to have a bed right next to her child so she can wake up and help care for the child.

After visiting the Regional Hospital our group ventured to Bogolyubovo Convent where we met the head of the convent and she then told us the rich history of the cathedral. There were so many beautiful icons everywhere, and we learned about Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky. When entering the cathedrals the girls had to wear a shawl on their heads and put a wrap around their waist like a skirt.



Bogolyubovo Convent

After visiting the convent our group headed to Davidovo to spend the evening at Tamara's sons dacha. The dacha was just breathtaking. It was out near the woods and it felt like home. The dacha was made of wood and the design was amazing. I felt privileged to be able to spend time there. We had dinner and celebrated Melissa Moody's birthday with some of the faculty. The celebration was so much fun it was full of laughter and singing.

Our group headed back to the center to go out with Olga T's son and some of his friends. We had fun seeing how nightlife was for our age group. We got to learn more about what they thought about our culture and what we thought about their culture. We also introduced them to snapchat. It was great to see how their music compared to ours.

On Saturday, students of the college picked up Ben and I, and took us to a coffee shop in the center. The coffee was very good and Ben had a huge cup of tea. After the going to the coffee shop we headed to Suzdal for the day since it was a distance away. The first thing we saw was a replica of the town made out of all wood.



Tasting medovukha

We traveled into Suzdal farther and learned that the town would make the people bring stones for the road as an entry fee. Inside the town there was a wishing stone where people back then would ask for things. We were told about how people got around and lived in the town. We saw a replica of what their cooking area might look like. While we were in Suzdal, there was a market going on and we got to see what everyone was selling. One man use to be in the theater and he demonstrated some sword skills. Don't worry - no one was hurt! A drink that is very popular in Suzdal is medovukha. This is a cider made from honey, and it was delicious.

Then we went on to see a monastery and a convent. Olga A. told us a legend about how the czars wife had a kid at the convent, but they are not sure whether if it is real or not. From an overlook, we were told that in Suzdal no building could be higher than two stories because they must be lower than the cathedrals. In Suzdal, there are no places you can stand and not see a cathedral.

Our group ventured to a pottery museum where they are famous for their pottery making. Later that night Serg had Max and his friends over for a small get together. We ended up all having coffee or tea due to it raining all day and being cold. We ended the night playing a fun game of Twister.

On Sunday, students picked us up to take us out to a picnic with the faculty and students of the college. When we arrived at the picnic it was out in a forested area like a park. While we waited for the food to be made we played volleyball, but Ben hit it over a fence that had a dog in it. Ben jumped the fence and saved the day by retrieving the ball from the jaws of the dog. After that the food was ready. We ate with the students, Tamara, and the faculty. They made us a wonderful meal of chicken, lamb, and pork. It was delicious. We were so glad that one of the students, Zoya, spoke English and translated for us. After eating we played volleyball and tug of war, but that was ended quickly when we snapped the rope. We also had jump rope competitions and played soccer and then they took us to look at the lake, which was beautiful.



Back row: Miranda Matheny, David Baker, Sarah Anderson, Bridget Good.  
Front row: Ben Stuff, Melissa Moody, Jenna Capriotti

When we got back to the cabin a professor played guitar and the students and him sang songs. The students also showed us some folk dancing and we danced in the cabin showing them our music. We also had a limbo competition and that was tons of fun. We went to Vera Ribina's to have dinner with her family. Her family made us a wonderful Russian meal that I will never forget. All the food was just wonderful and the family was great hosts for dinner.



Sheredar Camp

On Monday, we were picked up and taken to Sheredar, which is a camp for kids with cancer and serious diseases. On our way there we stopped at a cathedral where Nina's friend was the head of, and he was nice enough to bless us on our journeys in Russia. We arrived at the oncology camp, and Ana, a student volunteer, took us around the camp and told us that each cabin could hold eight kids. The cabins were so big and so nice. They had a soccer field, sand volleyball, a horse stable and much more. After

getting a tour we went and had lunch in the cafeteria. We notice balloons everywhere and so we asked what they were for. Ana told us the place had just been opened two days before we arrived and kids were coming in the next few days.

After we had lunch we got to meet Terry Dignan who is in charge of setting up the camp. He told us Michael Bondarev came to him with the idea to put an oncology camp like the ones in Europe and America in Russia. He told us the purpose of the camp is for kids with serious diseases that don't usually get to leave their house. It is a camp that lets the kids do things they usually don't get to do since they are either at home or getting treatment. He also told us that there are doctors and nurses that would be working with volunteers so the kids would still be taken care of while at the camp. I thought this camp was wonderful and I was just amazed at everything they were going to be doing there.

We drove back to Vladimir and went to the center. We went to the mall and got some great things. The group then went out on an adventure to find a café in the center. We were successful and had a wonderful rest of the night.

These are my group's adventures for the first week of Russia. I am so glad that I had the opportunity to go on this trip. I am so appreciative of my host Serg who fed us with wonderful food. I am grateful for all the wonderful student and faculty that I got to meet. For the families that made us wonderful food for either lunch or dinner it was always good. I have made friends that I will never forget and memories that will last a lifetime. Thank you everyone that made this an adventure of a lifetime.

## Journal 2 - Russia: Where the Cathedrals Touch the Sky

By Ben Stuff and David Baker

The second week in Russia was just as eventful as our first. Each day had a pleasant mix of both touring while learning about Russia's culture and exploring different aspects of Russia's health care system.

At the start of the week we visited the local children's nursing home, which is a state operated facility that provides care for orphaned children, or children taken from unsuitable homes until the age of four. Once the child reaches the age of four, he/she is then sent to an orphanage. One of the most amazing aspects of this facility and Russia's health care system in general is that it costs nothing.

Although Russia's health care system may not be as technologically advanced as the U.S., it is still unbelievable to think that everyone has the capability of receiving health care for free, when it is so expensive and in many cases unavailable for citizens of our country. From the moment we walked into this facility, there was a palpable feeling of a place of genuine care and compassion. One of the directors of the facility discussed with us how expensive and difficult the adoption process can be, just as it often can be in the United States. Nevertheless, some of the nurses in the facility become so attached to the children they care for that they eventually adopt them and give the child a loving home. In many ways, this demonstrates the true care and compassion the children in this facility receive on a daily basis.

This facility also allowed parents with children who have special needs to bring their child to the facility for 45 days for individualized training and rehab. We found this to be an interesting and beneficial concept. Providing care for a child with special needs can become an overwhelming and daunting task for even the best parents, so this program allows the parents to receive a break and for their child to receive individualized



L-R: Melissa Moody, David Baker, Bridget Good, Miranda Matheny, Sarah Anderson, Jenna Capriotti, Ben Stuff

treatment. Many of the children in this facility had medical issues that prohibited them from being adopted, which may have also been reasons for why they were given up by their parents. The staff at this facility incessantly worked with the children and provided the love and care that a child so desperately needs. Children received care and support from doctors, nurses, speech therapists, massage therapists and other health care professionals.

Most of the equipment at the facility was designed for rehabilitation and developing the necessary motor skills these children needed. We all found this equipment to be interesting because many of us had never seen anything like it before. As previously stated, the equipment was designed to help these children with relatively weak muscles and underdeveloped muscular systems to gain the necessary muscle strength and coordination. In addition, the daily massage therapy the children received would also help to strengthen their muscles and gain the necessary control over motor movements.

Although this facility was wonderful, demonstrated true compassion, and was able to accomplish remarkable work, it did shed a light on the stigma of mental disorders that Russia is still faced with. The staff would often discuss how many of these children, who had Down syndrome or other mental or physical disorders, would have no future. After talking with other health care professionals during our stay, we sadly found this to be true. The concepts of mental illnesses or genetic disorders such as Down syndrome are still not socially accepted in Russia. We found that programs designed to incorporate people with special needs or mental illnesses into society were few and far between. In fact, people who have these disorders are often ostracized or excluded from society and cared for by family members in the privacy of the home.

One physician discussed how Russia does not have many individuals with Down syndrome because mothers often receive abortions after early genetic testing reveals their child has the disorder. He also stated how patients with mental disorders are treated on special floors which had a very institutional feel about them. For example, he described how when he visited a psychological illness ward at one of the hospitals the patients were locked on the floor with no door handles on the inside of the door. The door handles were

located on the outside of the door, which only allowed health care professionals to enter and kept the patients from leaving. As strange as this may seem, it is important to remember that not too long ago our country shared many of the same viewpoints. We have only recently overcome these barriers and the stigma that existed regarding mental illnesses and other disabilities.

Programs to incorporate individuals with these disabilities into society have just recently been created. Therefore, it is our job to help spread this ideology, create similar viewpoints that abolish social stigmas, and lead the way for the development of additional social support programs.

In addition to visiting this facility, early in the week we also had the opportunity to attend several classes at Vladimir Medical College. Once again, this college is state run, so students receive a free college education. However, since this college is state run and free for students it does not have a tremendous amount of income for updates and repairs.

The buildings of the colleges are quite old so the equipment and classrooms are not as modern when compared to the U.S. buildings and classrooms. The students often sat together on long benches in a rather small room and attentively listened as their instructor shared the knowledge on the art of nursing. Teachers informed us that most of the educational program was focused on general nursing and it took a student three and a half years to complete the curriculum. Interestingly, some of the students at the college had nursing as their second major, or even comparable to our minor educations. For example, some of the students had degrees in biology or kinesiology, with nursing being their second education and used as a means of providing quick care in emergency situations.

We had the opportunity to sit in on an anatomy class, a skills class, and a class discussing the benefits of hand hygiene. In many ways, the information that was presented to their students is



Miranda Matheny practicing a cranial wrap in Skills class

very similar to the information that has been taught to us. In the anatomy class we talked about the heart and the importance of nurses having a firm understanding of how the heart works because of the increase in cardiovascular diseases around the world.

In the skills class we watched how to properly wrap patients before other medical interventions can be performed. This was interesting to watch for us because many of us had not seen some of the different wrapping techniques because they are not often used in our health care system. As always, the importance of hand hygiene was emphasized and nurses in Russia are becoming more familiar with the importance of proper hand hygiene with regards to infection control. One difference is that the faculty instructor placed less emphasis on using water and soap as a routine part of hand hygiene because of its harmful effects on the natural oils that protect our skin. Overall, the information that was presented to us was very similar to the education we received early on in our own program.

One of the physicians we talked to stated how he admired how the nursing profession was treated in the United States. For instance, he stated how in the U.S. nurses have more responsibility and are treated as critical thinkers with a higher profession. Nurses have the capability to specialize in more areas and help physicians perform various procedures, or deliver care in countless ways. Physicians often rely on the observations and notes nurses make to help guide the necessary care a patient needs. This attitude regarding nursing helps foster a working environment that supports interdisciplinary teamwork, which has shown to improve patient care and satisfaction.

Oppositely, in Russia nurses are more or less obedient to the demands of physicians and often do not work independently. Nurses do not chart regularly and often do not communicate their findings with physicians. The surgeon we talked with discussed how this aspect of nursing needs to change in Russia because nurses and physicians need to collaborate to provide patients with the best care.

Towards the middle of the second week we had the opportunity to visit a rehabilitation center. Once again, this was a state run facility, which meant the services were provided for free to the public. This facility reminded me of an older gym or

workout facility with older and well used equipment. During our tour we were able to see some of the various methods the hospital uses to treat pain as well. For example, the staff who gave us the tour showed how they often use electricity, water therapy, magnets or low doses of infrared light to help alleviate pain. At the end of our tour we had the opportunity to talk with the head physician of the facility, who had visited Bloomington and the United States several times. The conversation we had with him was very interesting and useful because he was able to compare both of our health care systems and state the benefits and faults of either. He discussed how he is currently working with his staff and other health care professionals to improve the preventive care Russia's health care system currently offers. He stated how smoking is a larger problem in Russia and how he is impressed every time he visits the U.S. because of how so few people smoke. We discussed ways he and other health care professionals are working to implement plans to decrease the rates of smoking and improve overall cardiovascular health around the country. In many ways, this is very similar to our own health care system because health care professionals in our country are currently trying to work on ways of improving preventive care and creating lifestyles that decrease the risk of many common diseases.

After visiting the rehabilitation center, we had the honor of visiting the famous school of gymnastics that resides in Russia which produces many Olympic athletes. Amazingly, this school is also completely free and works to help keep kids safe and to continue to make good decisions. During our tour of the facility we were able to see the museum the school has which showed all of the Olympic athletes that have been trained there and the ample medals these athletes brought back home with them. Students often start at this school at the young age of four or five and practice two to three times a day. In between practice, the school sends the students to their academic classes to receive proper education. It was a true honor and privilege to tour this one of a



School of gymnastics

kind facility and to create friendships with those who keep the school operating. The leaders of this school treated us as if we were their own family. They showered us with gifts, fed us until we were about to burst, and provided us with a bus that transported us to and from Moscow. We all felt honored and privileged to have met them.

Later on in the week we were able to visit one of the branches of Vladimir Medical College in Murom. Once again, we were greeted by many of the students who were enthusiastic and thrilled to meet us. On the day we visited the school, the college was hosting a competition between local colleges of nursing. The students competed in various events that demonstrated many of the skills they have learned so far. For example, the first year students competed in the art of bed making and following all of the particular protocols and procedures. Other students competed in puzzle games related to nursing and in giving demonstrations about various health care topics. We all enjoyed this idea of gathering nursing students from around the area and participating in friendly competition. This gathering can help to unite health care workers, which allows different methods of practice to be shared and discussed, so patients can receive the best health care as possible.

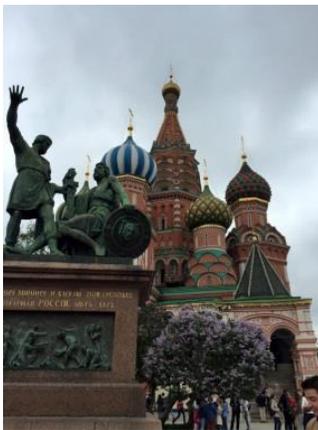
In addition, we also found it interesting how physical fitness is a part of the curriculum at Vladimir Medical College and students would often participate in physical fitness contests at other colleges as well. The faculty and students believed that as health care professionals it was their duty and responsibility to be physically fit because as health care professionals it is necessary to set an example for patients. We all thought both of these concepts would be beneficial to implement at colleges in our own local community.

At the end of the second week we had the privilege of touring the regional blood transfusion and donation center. This was by far one of the nicest and most modern facilities we had visited on the trip. We were all impressed to learn



Blood transfusion and donation center

about the high standards of blood screening that are used in Russia. The head of the facility shared with us that each blood product is screened six times before being used as medical interventions. He informed us that Russia has one of the lowest rates of blood products being contaminated or being recorded as the wrong type. As he gave us a tour of the facility, we all enjoyed the pride and the enthusiasm he had in his voice as he talked. It was evident he was genuinely proud of the work he and his staff have accomplished at this facility. During the tour of the facility we were able to see all of the new equipment that the head physician had brought back to this facility from all over the world. We saw large deep freezes that maintain temperatures below 40 C, machines that can detect blood viruses that have only been present for five days, and machines for separating the various blood components. In addition to the impressive equipment, we were also impressed by the donation system Russia has for its citizens. For example, the physician explained to us that donors receive two days of paid vacation and a free meal on the day they donate. Donors can receive an honorable status when they donate red blood cells 60 times, or when they donate plasma 40 times. Being an honorable donor grants the donor certain privileges. For example, the individual receives a medal, a decreased wait in certain lines, extended vacation from work, and other monetary incentives. Not surprisingly, these incentives have led to an increase in the amount of donors the facility has seen.



Moscow – St. Basil's Cathedral

On our last Saturday in Russia, we had the opportunity to visit the capital, Moscow. Unfortunately, we only had a brief amount of time to spend in Moscow because of time constraints and the distance from Vladimir. However, even with the short amount of time we visited this beautiful city, we were able to gain an impression for just how large and magnificent this city truly is. Nina informed us that the circumference of the road that encircles the city is equal to the distance from Moscow to Vladimir, which is at least a three hour car drive. In addition, Moscow itself is the size of Belgium and has more people inhabiting the city than the total population of Belgium. The vast amount of history and true architectural beauty this

city offered will leave an impression for a lifetime. Words simply cannot justify the true magnificence of the city. It is a must visit city that we all hope to return to one day to explore even more.

The morning of the last day we had in Russia was spent learning about the work health care professionals are doing to surmount the epidemic of tuberculosis that once plagued a greater portion of the country. During our visit to the TB dispensary we learned from the director of the hospital that TB is decreasing in Russia, while HIV is actually on the rise. The head of the TB hospital is also on the board of the Bloomington/Vladimir Sister Cities Organization and he discussed the importance of transcultural programs like this one because these programs allow health care professionals to communicate. This communication helps to improve practice and provide patients with the best possible care. Throughout the tour he described how the facility has changed over time and the advancements that have been made, or are currently being made, to help protect the patients and the staff. He stated that there have been no incidences where a staff member has contracted TB since 2006 after the implementation of new guidelines and protocols.

Though this building is also quite old and gave off the feeling of an old psychiatric institution, this was by far one of the most effective hospitals for treating TB in all of Russia. The physician stated how people from all over the world come to this facility to train and learn how to properly treat patients with TB in a manner that is safe for the patients and for health care professionals. Each room was equipped with a UV light that research has shown works to decrease the amount of microorganisms in the air. In addition, the hospital has mechanical ventilation that works to keep the air circulating to limit the amount of microorganisms that can build up. However, he reminded us the importance of knowing the model and size of your own individual fitted mask because these systems can fail and it is important to maintain safety in emergency situations.

During the tour we also had the opportunity to see the cultures of TB that were being incubated. He showed us a machine the hospital uses, which allows them to diagnose the type of TB in 90 minutes. This can dramatically effect and improve the care a patient receives because the type of care largely depends on the type of TB. Diagnosis

based off of the growth on a culture can take many weeks, so in many ways this machine has proven to be invaluable. The director of the hospital also discussed the effectiveness of the food incentive program Russia uses to help individuals maintain their therapeutic regimen for TB medications after being discharged. Patients receive a food incentive every time they come to receive their TB medication, which has worked to dramatically increase the rates of compliance.

Lastly, the experience at this facility really showed us the amount of waste that exists within our health care system. This facility made their own medium for growing samples of TB and used cloth stoppers for glass vials that would be sterilized and reused. In our health care system we often find items being thrown away without any sort of hesitation. In fact, we found this decrease of waste to be true for all of the facilities we visited. At the school the students showed us equipment that is used for sterilization of small items that we would normally throw away without a second thought, like bandages used for wrappings. Waste is a large problem in our health care system and often accounts for the increase in medical expenses. This opportunity will help us to advocate for ways to reduce waste and find ways to reuse the materials we already have.

Throughout the entire trip, we were all entirely amazed at the hospitality we received. The meals were all extraordinary and probably caused us all to gain at least ten pounds (maybe even more). It is absolutely amazing how our hosts opened up their homes to us and gave us their space for two weeks.

Our host would come every morning to make a delicious homemade breakfast and make sure we were awake and prepared for the day. Even the students at the college were extremely welcoming and excited to see us. Some of the students cooked us wonderful meals, provided us with transportation to various events, and even put on a performance that consisted of singing and dancing on our last day. No matter how many times we tried, none of our hosts would let us pay for our meals or even clean our dirty dishes. In fact, our host stated that there is an old saying that if you (the host) let other people (your guests) do your dishes then you will have no money. To this day we are still unsure if this

is really a saying and a Russian tradition, or if this was simply a trick to keep us from doing to dishes. Either way, we are all forever grateful for all that was done for us.

So many individuals greeted us with such compassion, enthusiasm and interest. Countless doors to loving homes and feasts were opened. We all feel as though sometimes we are not nearly as excited when we receive individuals from other countries because it is

relatively common in our country to meet people from all over the world. As a country we are very diverse and have the opportunity to meet people from all over the world on a more frequent basis. It is bothersome to think that the stigma created by politics may prevent tourists from visiting this wonderful and beautiful country that we had the opportunity to embrace. We were met with such excitement, showered with countless gifts, and fed until we felt like we were going to explode. Many of us may take this opportunity of meeting people from around the world for granted and it is important to remember how special this occurrence really is. All of us who went on this wonderful adventure will keep this thought in mind as we continue to meet others and hopefully return the favor of hosting them in our futures.

Some nights we would watch the sun set from the window of our apartment building. As the sun would descend into the far distant west it would cast its last rays of light upon the city. The vibrant streaks of red, yellow and orange would mix with the calm blue of the clear night sky to create a peaceful purple that casted over the tops of distant trees. Looking around we would see other tall apartment complexes staggering over ten stories to accommodate the thousands who lived in the city. Although the outside color of these larger apartment buildings had faded and they appeared old or even run down, each of them shed a warm home-like light upon the city streets.



Students from Vladimir Medical College and Tamara, Director with MCN students – Student picnic

Between the buildings stood tall green trees, which gave the feeling of a city immersed or even engulfed by the natural wilderness that surrounded it. On the streets below many cars recklessly zoomed past one another and waited to be washed by the next rainfall. City busses looking like large insects incessantly ran with their long antennas attached to wires above, which occasionally gave off an electrical spark that would illuminate the night sky.

Lining the streets were several small shops, cafes, bars and other buildings. Each of these buildings had bright signs which bore symbols and words that really had no meaning to either of us. Around these stores and under the streetlights walked hundreds of people, no matter the day of the week. As we looked down upon these people from above, we strangely did not think of them as Russians. Although they make speak another language, wear different clothes and embrace different cultural habits, or viewpoints, at the end of the day they are still human beings, who share many similar qualities to the rest of us. Excluding the occasional criminals or monsters that lurk at any corner of the Earth, in the end people are people no matter where you go.

It is important to remember this concept in life because sometimes this idea or viewpoint can become lost in the shuffle of what media or powerful political figures tell us. Although these important and influential politicians are supposed to represent the country as a whole, they often do not represent the people. Each of us are unique in our own individual ways, but we all share many commonalities. This concept is necessary to keep in mind because it helps us to put aside what others tell us and allows each of us to express our individuality and receive the respect that we all deserve. Putting aside the brain washing of mass media and sharing in the love, laughter and memories of others helps make life even more enjoyable.

This trip demonstrated how language may be a barrier to verbal communication, but it does not inhibit the formation of deep relationships that make life worth living. In the words of Nina, our host, translator and friend, “all people are beautiful”.



*To Our Wonderful Russian Family- Spasibo*