

Impressions of Thailand: A Professor's Year in the Buddhist Country

BY LEE LEWIS HUSK



Professor Katherine Crabtree, D.N.Sc., F.A.A.M., A.N.P., addresses a class of Thai students at St. Louis College of Nursing in Bangkok.

Among Katherine Crabtree's impressions of Thailand where she lives and works are: The Thai people are much more family oriented; their king, who was born in the United States and educated at Harvard University, is revered; they are more relaxed about sex; they love pop rock; everyone has a cell phone; and traffic jams in Bangkok are legendary (but no elephants are allowed on the streets anymore).

Crabtree, D.N.Sc., F.A.A.N., A.N.P., professor in the OHSU School of Nursing, is spending a one-year sabbatical at St. Louis College of Nursing in Bangkok to help the college develop advanced practice nursing options at the master's degree level. She also teaches classes to Thai students from around the country, helps faculty members publish research in English in professional journals, and has visited several hospitals.

Crabtree was at home in Portland when the tsunami hit Thailand's beaches. "The fund-raising concerts and disaster relief funds continue here as the need is so great," She says. Her college has sent teams to help with the disaster, but she has been unable to go due to teaching responsibilities.

She says the health care system is like stepping back into the 1960s in the U.S. "The Thai health care system is in crisis, and nurses are under-utilized resources," she reports. "Nurses are often at the desk, and the head nurse is primarily the one who speaks with the physicians. There are few female doctors." On the other hand, she adds, "We could learn a lot from the Thais about delivery of family-centered care in the hospital. They tend to incorporate all kinds of therapies (massage, herbs) and fewer prescription drugs." The country is 95 percent Buddhist, and people believe that "you are what you are because of past lives, so you earned or deserve your fate."

Like many visitors to Thailand, Crabtree has found that the best part of the country is the people. "They are warm, welcoming and wonderful to foreigners. They love to laugh and have fun," and she says they are patient with her "feeble attempts to speak Thai," which she is trying to learn. "To practice as a licensed nurse in Thailand, you must be fluent in Thai." However, for anyone wishing to spend an extended length of time in the country, Crabtree says, the country is seeking native English speakers to teach English.