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I have always been proud of being an oncology clinical trials research nurse. I have been a registered nurse for 15 years, and have been involved in clinical trials for the last 11 years. I am an oncology certified nurse and a certified clinical research professional. What I have enjoyed the most about my job is both taking care of my patients and the interdisciplinary aspect of managing the care of a patient that participates in a clinical trial.

Last Fall I was invited to participate in an International Clinical Trials Workshop that was going to take place in Uruguay. ASCO and NCI were sponsoring the workshop and had asked ONS for a Spanish speaking clinical trial nurse. I felt honored when I was chosen to be the ONS ambassador to such an important symposium.

It was a long flight from Houston to Montevideo, Uruguay. I had a connection in Panama City, Panama and finally arrived in Montevideo around 4:30 in the morning. A “driver” was waiting for me and took me to the hotel in Punta del Este. This was supposed to be about an hour and a half drive, but this person made it in less than an hour! I was a little nervous since it was also raining.

We made it safely to the hotel and I went straight to the reception desk. Knowing that check-in times in most hotels is around 3pm, I was already thinking about which couch in the lobby I was going to use for my nap. To my surprise, a room was ready for me! They anticipated I would be tired and reserved a room for me starting the previous night so I could have it available on arrival.

At first, I was not sure what the expectations were of me. I was asked to lead a workshop for the nurses, but I did not know their knowledge base. I also volunteered to share one of the sessions with one of the physicians, and talk about the role of the research nurse and other non-physician members of the clinical trial team.

I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm and eagerness of the nurses to learn about clinical trials. But the biggest surprise was how well the physicians involved in clinical trials responded to the idea of a nurse as a valuable member of the clinical trials team. Some of the nurses told me how much they would like to have a more active role in the management of the clinical trials, but did not know if their physicians would understand the potential value of their contribution to the clinical trials team.

There is definitely much work to be done. The role of the nurse in South America is not the same as that of the United States. The educational preparation received by the South American nurses is very different from ours, and it will take a great effort to raise them to the same standard as the oncology and clinical trials nurses in the US. However, I do believe with the appropriate support and resources, it can be accomplished.

I can definitely say my experience in Uruguay was very satisfying. I felt proud of my profession and of my role in the clinical trials team. Most rewarding of all was the feeling that I brought hope to my fellow nurses of a bigger and greater role in the care of their patients.