During the past summer, Beverly Flynn, professor of nursing at Indiana University’s School of Nursing, was an active participant in two international programs concerned with health in world’s urban areas. Flynn heads the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Center for Healthy Cities program based at IUPUI. The Healthy Cities program grew out of the realization at WHO that two-thirds of the world’s population live in cities, where social and health inequalities abound and where rapid population growth is posing major threats to public health.

In June, Flynn attended the “International Healthy Cities Conference” held in Athens, Greece. The conference marked ten years of the Healthy Cities movement in Europe. More than 175 presentations were made by Healthy Cities representatives from throughout the world, providing an important international forum for exchange, learning, discussion, debate, and worldwide networking.

At one of the opening plenary sessions, representatives of each of the six WHO world regions presented reports on the global nature, diversity, and character of Healthy Cities, Communities, and Municipalities in their respective regions. Flynn, representing the regional Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), showcased the Healthy Municipality of Versales, Colombia, which was partly featured in a Healthy Municipalities videotape prepared by PAHO. Many other presentations focused on the global adaptation of the Healthy Cities approach throughout the world. At the close of the conference, mayors and their representatives participating in the conference signed the Conference Declaration, which emphasized the place of health in the political agenda of local communities.

Later in the summer, Flynn again represented PAHO, this time at the Fourth Western Hemispheric Forum of Sister Cities International, which held its annual conference in Miami, Florida. Sister Cities International is a worldwide program of linkages between cities in different countries whose goal is to promote cultural understanding and goodwill between different cultures through grassroots programs on cultural, educational, professional, and economic exchange. It is one of the premier examples of “citizen diplomacy networks” in the United States, and is a leader in the national movement for global community partnerships and volunteer action.

At the Fourth Western Hemispheric Forum of Sister Cities International, Flynn made a presentation on the Healthy Municipalities and Cities movement globally, with special emphasis on the Western hemisphere. Among the topics that she covered: what is a Healthy City, the principles and promotion of the “health for all” concept, characteristics of successful Healthy Cities, survey results of 183 Healthy Cities globally, multicity action plans in Europe, and sites of Healthy Municipalities, Cities, and Communities in the PAHO Region of Latin America, United States, and Canada.

At the close of her presentation, Flynn posed a set of pertinent questions: (1) Aren’t the aims of the Sister Cities and Healthy Cities programs complementary? (2) What examples are there of Sister City-Healthy City collaboration and what can be learned from these examples? (3) Can the promotion of health and development be furthered through Sister City-Healthy Cities collaboration?

The forum provided opportunities to network among Sister Cities leaders in different parts of the world and to begin identifying Sister Cities that may wish to promote the Healthy Municipalities and Cities approach in their localities and regions. Flynn has been encouraged by the number of follow-up requests for further information that she has received since her return.

—RMN