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SUBMISSIONS

Please e-mail submission (ideas, photos, articles, trainings, dates, accolades, local or national news, etc.) to Araceli.Casas@sdcounty.ca.gov

For consideration in next issue, please submit entries by close of business on May 17, 2024. Submission limits: 125-275 words

May Topic: ANA Nurses Make a Difference



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Climate Change in Public Health Nursing

By: Tyler Eickholt, RN, PHN

Climate change is a pressing issue that has a direct impact on public health nursing. As temperatures rise, extreme weather events become more frequent, and natural disasters become more severe. Public health nurses face new challenges in providing care and promoting wellness in their communities.

One of the most immediate effects of climate change on public health nursing is the increase in natural disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires, and floods. These events can cause widespread devastation and displacement, leading to a range of physical and mental health issues for affected populations. Public health nurses play a crucial role in providing emergency care, coordinating relief efforts, and addressing the long-term health effects of these disasters.

Most recently, public health nurses staffed the Local Assistance Centers to support the community after the devastating January 2024 flooding. The nurses assessed for mold Damage in households, provided education on safe mold removal, and handed out N95 masks. PHNs provided education on medication re-fills through insurance and disaster related transportation vouchers with Uber. Additionally, PHN tables were equipped with first aide, COVID test kits, and Narcan, to be distributed to the community.

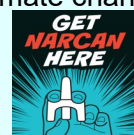
Climate change is also leading to an increase in heat-related illnesses. As temperatures continue to rise, vulnerable populations are at a higher risk of heat stress, heat stroke, and dehydration. Vulnerable populations may include seniors, children, and individuals with chronic illnesses. Public health nurses are tasked with educating these populations on the importance of staying hydrated, seeking shelter in cool places, and recognizing the signs of heat-related illnesses.

Furthermore, climate change is exacerbating air pollution and respiratory illnesses. Increased temperatures can lead to higher levels of ground-level ozone, which can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma and COPD. Public health nurses must work with individuals who have these conditions to develop strategies for managing their symptoms during times of poor air quality. This may include staying indoors, using air purifiers, and connecting individuals to health care to adequately manage their health condition.

In conclusion, climate change is a significant threat to public health nursing. As temperatures rise, and extreme weather events become more frequent, County of San Diego public health nurses remain dynamic in our approach to healthcare. We continuously adapt to new challenges in providing care and promoting wellness in the community. By staying informed on the latest research, and collaborating with other healthcare professionals, our public health nurses play a vital role in protecting the health of their communities in the face of climate change.



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Sustainability

Climate Change in Public Health Nursing

By: *Foot Team Nurses Andrea Huerta, RN, PHN and
Alejandra Sanchez Lopez, RN, PHN*

As nurses, being aware of climate changes and its impact allows us to better prepare and educate our clients. Our profession requires knowledge, skill, and awareness with the unsheltered community. As Public Health Nurses on Foot teams, we consider how climate changes can impact our unsheltered clients. We can inform them on upcoming weather conditions to better prepare and find a shelter or a safe location. These clients are frequently exposed to rain or thunderstorms and sometimes strong heat waves depending on the season. Homeless Outreach Teams collaborate with Foot Team nurses to advocate for and increase client's awareness of shelters and alternate safer living areas.

As Disaster Service Workers, Public Health Nurses for the County of San Diego should be prepared to deploy in response to natural disasters, to support emergency efforts, such as the January 22, 2024 floods that impacted certain areas across San Diego. Natural disasters such as the unexpected heavy rainstorms, can contaminate the water supply, cause flooding and/or effect food supplies. Heavy rain and flooding can also affect people's homes, requiring evacuation or displacement at temporary emergency shelters. Public Health Nurses can better support such efforts "with their focus on population health and investment in communities to aid in improving their health and preventing disease, Public Health Nurses are critical in propelling climate action initiatives forward. Their training and experience with working in teams are additionally beneficial in creating partnerships with other disciplines to support climate change efforts" (Rosa, W.E. et al., 2019). Other examples of extreme weather/climate change can be seen during summer months with droughts/heatwaves, when nurses can also prepare by ensuring that water is available and that clients are aware of "Cool Zones" across the County. Heatwaves can lead to fires and increase air pollution, resulting in poor air quality.

In shelter environments and natural disaster situations, clients tend to experience increased levels of anxiety and stress when faced with experiencing the impact of natural disasters. In such settings, Public Health Nurses and nurses collaborate with shelter organizers such as the American Red Cross to identify and understand the needs of clients, assess safety and infection control measures, attend to basic needs, and provide active listening support to community members. Nurses can remain up-to-date and aware of available community resources and educate clients on topics such as heat stroke prevention of heat stroke, the importance of staying hydrated, and to stay in the shade reduce of occurrences of heat related illnesses and sunburns. With continued Homeless Outreach Team endeavors, Foot team nurses engage various communities, offering items such as hygiene kits, water bottles, wide-brimmed hats for sun protection against long-term sun exposure, heat stroke, and skin cancer education. These sentiments of Public Health Nursing is echoed in research by Dupraz, J and Burand, B (2021) stated as "healthcare professionals have a professional public health duty to foster the assessment and implementation of effective interventions, to improve the education of their peers, and to keep informing and alerting various audiences through potentially appropriate communication interventions. Indeed, the association of health issues with climate and environment change could constitute an effective lever for change."



References

- Dupraz J, Burn and Burnand, B. Role of Health Professionals Regarding the Impact of Climate Change on Health-An Exploratory Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Mar 20;18(6):3222. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18063222. PMID: 33804669; PMCID: PMC8003659.
- Rosa, W.E., Schenk, E., Travers, J.L. and Nicholas, P.K. (2019), Climate change and health consequences: Engaging public health nursing within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *Public Health Nurs*, 36: 107-108 <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12598>