LIVEWELL NURSING

NURSE'S NOTES

By: Angela Mitchell, CNO



Embracing Sustainability: The Evolving Role of Nurses in Addressing Climate Change

In the face of escalating environmental challenges, nurses are increasingly called upon to play a vital role in promoting sustainability and addressing the impacts of climate change within healthcare settings. The healthcare sector is a significant contributor to environmental degradation, with hospitals and clinics generating substantial amounts of waste and greenhouse gas emissions. Recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental health and human health, nurses are uniquely positioned to advocate for sustainable practices that reduce the carbon footprint of healthcare facilities and promote eco-friendly initiatives that benefit both patients and the broader community.

Nurses can lead the way in implementing green healthcare practices, such as reducing medical waste, conserving energy and water, and promoting recycling initiatives within their clinical settings (Smith et al., 2022). Also, by educating patients on the connections between environmental health and personal well-being, nurses can empower individuals to make sustainable lifestyle choices that support both their health and the health of the planet (Jones & Brown, 2021). Furthermore, nurses can engage in advocacy efforts to promote environmentally sustainable healthcare policies and practices at the institutional and governmental levels, driving systemic change that benefits both patients and the environment (Taylor, 2021).

As frontline healthcare providers, we as nurses have a unique opportunity to champion sustainability and address the challenges of climate change within our practice. By embracing eco-conscious behaviors, advocating for green healthcare initiatives, and educating patients on the importance of environmental health, nurses can make a significant impact in creating a more sustainable and resilient healthcare system for future generations.



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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 refills 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.



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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

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.



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."



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