



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN NURSING PRACTICE : FINDING THE COURAGE TO EXPLORE NEW APPROACHES

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**Lisa Stafford BN RN & Bonnie Hamilton Bogart
BN RN on behalf of Team Nurses**

OUTLINE

- Why Nurses
- Why children
- Team Nurses – History and Success
- Challenges
- Lessons learned
- Changing the lens – opportunities for action



NURSE'S ROLE : ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



- Nurses Role: The CNA (2007) recognizes that “ the purpose of nursing education in environmental health is to ensure that every nurse can consider environmental factors that may be contributing to poor health, understand environmental hazards and their impact on health, understand the role of individuals & communities in providing good stewardship of the environment, and make recommendations about how to reduce or prevent exposures to environmental hazards” (P. 1).

NURSES ROLE

- FLORENCE NIGHTENGALE
- Canadian Nurses Association (CNA)
- Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA)
- Community Health Nurses of Canada (CHNC)
- Canadian Nurses for Health and the Environment (CHNE)
- IOM Nursing and Environment Report
- International Council of Nurses (ICN)
- Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments



WHY CHILDREN ?

- They are the most vulnerable

Their exposures are greater :

- **body mass** (kg for kg of body weight, a child will drink more water, eat more food and breathe more air than an adult)
- **physiology** (e.g., breathing is more rapid, ability to metabolize and excrete contaminants is less developed than in adults)
- **behaviours** (children tend to be more active, explore their environment orally, and play lower to the ground where contaminants settle)



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

- Canada, a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is obligated to protect children's health.
- Over 80,000 chemicals have been produced since the mid 1950s.
- Over 80% have never been tested for safety to human health.



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

- Over 200 chemicals known to be toxic to the developing brain and are used in common household products including lead, mercury, pesticides, phenol and benzene
- These chemicals found in human blood, cord blood and breastmilk
- There was a time before chemicals in the environment – the 50 and 60's , since then over 80,000 chemicals introduced into commerce , 80% that are not tested



TEAM NURSES : FINDING THE COURAGE TOGETHER

- Background and History
- Upstream Approach to prevent negative health effects of Env. hazards in children given their unique vulnerabilities

To date , Team Nurses has :

- Presented at Can Association of Schools of Nursing
- written and article on Environmental Health and Nursing Practice in NB (NANB Journal)
- Provided education , tool and resources for Perinatal Support Group
- Built capacity within communities through school districts
- Created policy change in HEB of OCMOH



TEAM NURSES – FINDING THE COURAGE TOGETHER

- The CEH Educational Workshop for PH professionals starring Dr. Landrigan and Dr. Hancock - outcomes : PH practice , Medical Society, more participation
- Developed Workplan that encompasses the Precautionary Principle
- Always recruiting Nurses from all sectors (First Nations, Universities, PH, etc)



***BREAKING NEW GROUND – LEAVING
FOOTSTEPS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**



ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUTH



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- Healthy Learners Challenge:

Summer Hill School:

Poem , Recycling Song

One Bag Challenge – Garden Creek

- Soap making
- School gardens
- Composting in schools
- Grab bags
- Active transportation



EXAMPLES

- The Queen of Green



- Teach them about products that are safe for use
- Teach them about recycling – they will teach adults !
- Involve them in The Built Environment
- Much we can not measure in the hearts of the children



DESPITE THE CHALLENGES

- Children's Environmental Health and Environmental Health in general are not recognized in most Nursing curricula
- EH not in job descriptions
- EH – a Nursing function ?
- Advocacy not widely practiced ! Nurses not comfortable with this despite our PH core competencies and CNA policies ?
- Short resources, time , funding



LESSONS LEARNED / SOME HELPFUL HINTS

- Don't go it alone – like minded allies are best
- Be creative , share resources
- Seek partnerships outside Nursing realm e.g physicians , municipal offices, early childhood education . Be at the Table
- Use the evidence
- Demonstrate leadership – action , advocacy, education
- Use Humour
- Advocate



CREATING BETTER ENVIRONMENTS – WHAT CAN WE DO ?

As stated by Dr. Trevor Hancock :

- Pay as much attention to the environmental determinants of health as the social determinants
- Recognize that ecosystem health is the ultimate determinant of the health of this and future generations
- Pay attention to and point to environmental health inequity wherever you see it and measure it
- Pay far more attention to the built environment
- Pay more attention to the importance of access to play and to nature



- Report , take action and advocate for action on all of the above .



TOGETHER, WE CAN SUCCEED!

