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Creative Nursing Vol. 25 #3 – Professional Practice in a Changing World: The Changing Climate

FROM THE EDITOR: The Changing Climate, by *Marty Lewis-Hunstiger, BSN, RN, MA, retired pediatric nurse and preceptor, editor-in-chief of Creative Nursing, copy editor of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies, and affiliate faculty member in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota.*

In our 2019 exploration of Professional Practice in a Changing World, Issue #3 confronts the defining challenge of our time. This issue contains inspiring reports on initiatives by climate champions in many arenas of nursing. The editorial describes each article and its connection to the health effects of climate change, calling out a quote from an article on planetary health (“Nursing care does not need to change; it simply needs to be applied to a much bigger target: the entire planet.”) and from the review of *Environmental Health in Nursing*, a textbook published by the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (“Reflecting the work of Florence Nightingale, the book’s perspective contextualizes the environment as a key element that nurses can modify for the benefit of their patients.”)

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR: Building a Global Movement for Health: Nurse Leadership on Climate Change, by *Katie Huffling, MS, RN, CNM, Executive Director of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments.*

The Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE) is a national nursing organization focused on the intersection of health and the environment, whose mission is to promoting healthy people and healthy environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, incorporating evidence-based practice, and influencing policy. Katie Huffling, Executive Director of ANHE, issues a call to action to tackle the challenge of climate change in support of the health of our patients, communities, and the world, in the same way that we have faced other environmental health challenges. She warns that the health effects of climate change can impact any patient population and every nursing specialty; nurses from around the world are already seeing the real-life impacts of climate change and are taking a variety of approaches to educate the profession and the public on climate and health, as well as working within the health-care industry to be leaders in addressing climate change. As the largest segment of the health-care workforce, the nursing profession, working together to address climate change, can help avert this potential public health catastrophe. She closes with a message of hope from Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*: “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all...We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Determined Action to Tackle Health Determinants: A Collaborative Response to the Challenge of Climate Change Mitigation in Practice Settings, by *Roslyn Elizabeth Morgan, RN, critical care nurse and Environmental Health Officer with the Victorian Branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.*

Nurses are aware of ominous emissions trajectories contributed by health care through its significant carbon footprint and environmentally degrading refuse, and the uncomfortable ethical dilemma this creates for those who commit to do no harm. Health is inextricably linked with the environment; climate change will increasingly have impacts on nurses personally and professionally. In addition to its impacts on human health, climate change is already having profound impacts on biological and social systems around the world. Nurses and their interprofessional colleagues are increasingly being called upon to act as experts on behalf of patients, communities, nursing organizations, and policymakers. A great opportunity exists for climate messaging, education, and mitigation initiatives both within the immediate workplace and to members of the broader community; however, studies have found that

nurses report feeling ill-equipped to do so. It is essential that an awareness of climate change be integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate education and ongoing professional development so that knowledge, skills, and insights critical for clinical practice in a climate-changing world are incorporated in nursing practice and research.

Planetary Health: The Next Frontier in Nursing Education, by *Teddie Potter, PhD, RN, FAAN, clinical coordinator of the Doctor of Nursing Practice in Health Innovation and Leadership program, and Director of Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota.* Climate change is only one symptom of an emerging and potentially catastrophic multi-system failure. Many nurses, especially trauma specialists, know how to deliver expert care when multiple systems are failing. The severity and urgency of global environmental issues requires a paradigm shift, from understanding health solely in human terms, to a deep awareness that human health and environmental health are inseparable. If students are taught about holism and interconnection, it is often on a theoretical level rather than as a true systems approach to all care; thus, nurses are sometimes surprised by the unintended consequences of well-meaning interventions. Planetary health is possible only when all disciplines work in partnership to co-design a better future. Those least responsible for climate change issues are often the ones to suffer first and worst; future nurses will be far more effective leaders if they can recognize and challenge those who are most responsible for causing climate change and other forms of environmental degradation. Nursing science adeptly designs and implements process improvements; therefore, nursing care does not need to change; it simply needs to be applied to a much bigger target: the entire planet.

The Nurses Climate Challenge: A National Campaign to Engage 5,000 Health Professionals around Climate Change, by *Shanda Demorest, DNP, RN-BC, PHN, clinical assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing, cardiovascular nurse at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, member of the Executive Committee of Minnesota-based Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate, and leader of the Nurses Climate Challenge; Sarah Spengeman, PhD, Associate Director of the Climate Program at Health Care Without Harm; Elizabeth C. Schenk, PhD, MHI, RN-BC, FAAN, faculty member at the Washington State University College of Nursing and Sustainability Coordinator at St. Patrick Hospital-Providence Health in Montana; Cara Cook, MS, RN, AHN-BC, Climate Change Program Coordinator for the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments; and Hermine Levey Weston, RN, MBA, Health Care Sustainability Engagement Manager at Practice Greenhealth.*

Given the abundant evidence of health impacts from climate change, it is our duty as nurses to meet our professional obligation by learning about climate change, addressing the hazards, and working to protect health. This group of experts has developed the Nurses Climate Challenge (NCC), a national campaign using the skills and power of nurses to engage health professionals in climate change action. To frame climate change action in a compelling and motivating light, Nurses Climate Challenge resources focused on the health impacts of a changing climate while emphasizing that these impacts are not a distant geographic or chronological threat, but a current reality. Self-nominated Nurse Climate Champions at participating sites give presentations on the health effects of climate change, and participate in their organizations' environmental activities. A dynamic web site tracks and reports on progress. To inspire and recruit new participants, the team periodically highlights individual Nurse Climate Champions who use NCC resources in unique and creative ways, in a variety of settings, and with diverse audiences, sharing their stories using the hashtag #NursesClimateChallenge

Sparkling a Movement for a Healthy Climate through Leadership Development, by *Rachel Kerr, BS, RN, OCN, oncology nurse and environmental advocate; Julia Frost Nerbonne, PhD, Executive Director of Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light and a professor of Sustainability at the University of Minnesota; and Teddie Potter, PhD, RN, FAAN, clinical professor, coordinator of the Doctor of Nursing Practice in*

Health Innovation and Leadership program and Director of Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota.

These authors report on a climate justice curriculum called Be the Spark, developed originally for faith communities but adapted here for audiences of health care professionals. Crafting a public narrative is a method of storytelling with a format that includes three elements: the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. The spectrum of allies model highlights population segments based on level of engagement and concern around climate change: the dismissive (active opponents), the doubtful (passive opponents), the disengaged and the cautious (neutral), the concerned (passive allies), and the alarmed (active allies). Using these tools of narrative and an understanding of the spectrum of allies, Be the Spark allows participants to assess their assets, understand the psychology of climate communication, and design appropriately-scaled actions to activate their communities through relationship building, practical action, and policy change.

Environmental Stewardship in Nursing: Introducing the WE ACT-PLEASE Framework, by *Elizabeth C Schenk, PhD, MHI, RN-BC, FAAN, faculty member at the Washington State University College of Nursing and Sustainability Coordinator at St. Patrick Hospital-Providence Health in Montana.*

The health-care industry itself is a significant polluter; health-care waste is complex, often highly regulated, and expensive to segregate and dispose of. Nurses, as the largest single professional group in U.S. health care, have a responsibility to decrease their contributions to health-care pollution, though they may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of doing so. Dr. Schenk developed a Nurses' Environmental Awareness Tool, measuring nurses' awareness and behaviors related to health-care pollution, and led the development of CHANT: Climate, Health and Nursing Tool, measuring nurses' awareness of and engagement with climate change. In this article she presents the WE ACT-PLEASE framework (Waste, Energy/Water, Agriculture/Food, Chemicals, and Transportation, calling on nurses' Professional Obligation, Leadership, Education, Accountability, Science, and Engagement). This model provides structure and guidance to help nurses decrease harm from practice, meet professional obligations, and create a healthier world. Relating harm from pollution to planetary-level challenges including climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion reminds nurses that environmental stewardship contributes to planetary health along with individual and community health.

Beyond the Slogans: Understanding the Ecological Consciousness of Nurses to Advance Ecological Knowledge and Practice, by *Fiona Hanley, RN, MSc, Nursing Program Coordinator of Dawson College in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and member of the Board of Directors of Canadian Nurses for Health and the Environment; and Sonya L. Jakubec, RN, PhD, Professor in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.*

These authors used a framework of radical ecopsychology, a system-oriented world view that provides critical psychological understanding of the social links between ecological crisis and human experience, and ecohealth, which advocates for building capacity around urban ecologies that are committed to earth care as a symbiotic ethical and political engagement, in assessing the ecological consciousness of a sample of Canadian nurses. They found that respondents' early nature experiences with family and in community influenced a sense of personal wellbeing and inspired life-long environmental interests, but that in their nursing careers, conflicting experiences of valuing health promotion alongside waste, over-packaged supplies, over-processed foods, and biochemical contamination in health-care settings led to cognitive dissonance and distress. Many faculty and students described ecological health as relegated to rhetorical or theoretical examples without substantive or practical engagement, and devoid of urgency or even interest among many leaders and colleagues. The authors concluded that environmental health remains marginalized in nursing education and practice, with nurses struggling to get beyond the slogans to arrive at practical applications.

THE VOICE OF PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Addressing Food Insecurity and Overweight/Obesity in Hospitalized Low-Income Latino Patients, by *Trina Lorraine Gipson-Jones, PhD, RN, Assistant Professor, and Bertha L. Davis, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN, Professor and Director of the PhD in Nursing program, both at Hampton University School of Nursing in Virginia; and Ché Matthew Harris, MD, MS, FACP, hospitalist at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center and Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.*

Food insecurity, the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life, is paradoxically associated with obesity; minorities—particularly low-income Latinos—are vulnerable to obesity, food insecurity, and other associative consequences. Obesity-related conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes remain leading causes of morbidity and mortality despite ample available nutritious food. Unhealthy food choices increase the likelihood of developing or exacerbating obesity and health care utilization, while adversely impacting the ability to prevent, manage, or control diet-sensitive disease processes. Food-insecure patients often purchase foods low in essential nutrients because healthier, more nutrient-rich foods tend to be more expensive. These authors urge all health-care professionals to be aware of and assess for food insecurity, and present tools to aid assessment. Hospitalization presents a unique opportunity to address food insecurity. Intervention efforts to combat food insecurity and overweight/obesity must consider multiple socioeconomic variables (e.g., income, cultural implications, numeracy, literacy, and language barriers).

Climate Change and Schools: Implications for Children’s Health and Safety, by *Stephanie Chalupka, EdD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAOHN, FNAP, Professor of Nursing and Director of the Master of Science in Nursing Program at Worcester State University, and Visiting Scientist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Region 3 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit, The Mid-Atlantic Center for Children’s Health at Georgetown University; and Laura Anderko, PhD, RN, Professor and Robert and Kathleen Scanlon Chair of Values Based Health Care at Georgetown University’s School of Nursing & Health Studies, and Director of the Region 3 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit The Mid-Atlantic Center for Children’s Health at Georgetown University.*

Projected climate change is anticipated to expand the geographic range and the accompanying burden of a wide range of climate-sensitive health outcomes, with significant impacts on public health. These authors point out the effects of general warming as well as severe weather events on schools, which is where children spend significant amounts of time. Incomplete development; immature physiology and metabolism; higher exposure to air, food, and water per unit of body weight; unique behavior patterns; and dependence on caregivers place children at higher risk for climate-related health burdens than adults. Structural damage, interrupted power supplies, toxic substance releases, and mold growth in schools can result in extended school closures, with significant economic and social impacts for students, their families, and their communities. Nurses are essential to informing climate change mitigation and adaptation plans, aided by the ability to communicate and collaborate with neighborhoods in assessing risks and addressing community health needs.

REFLECTING ON OUR HISTORY

In Nightingale’s Footsteps—Individual to Global: From Nurse Coaches to Environmental and Civil Society Activists, by *Deva-Marie Beck, PhD, RN, International Co-Director of the Nightingale Initiative for Global Health, and co-author of “Florence Nightingale Today: Healing, Leadership, Global Action”; and Barbara Montgomery Dossey, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN, HWNC-BC, Co-Director of the International Nurse Coach Association.*

This article profiles the environmental activism of Florence Nightingale, the philosophical founder of modern secular nursing and the first recognized nurse theorist, who also ranks among the most brilliant sanitary, medical, and health-care reformers in history. Nightingale’s understanding of the connections between health and the environment addressed key issues affecting the people of India:

environmental degradation, lack of investment in wasted land, and the resulting poverty and starvation of “one fifth of the human race — our fellow countrymen and countrywomen.” She cultivated connections with the media professionals of her time, making sure they understood and disseminated her concepts and convictions, calling these activities “health-nursing” and declaring, “Health is not only to be well, but to *use well every power we have.*” In our times, the same environmental and social health determinants that were of concern to Florence Nightingale are understood as key factors in achieving global development. These authors have created the Nightingale Initiative for Global Health, which honors the legacy of Nightingale and other nurses, midwives, and health-care workers past and present who have shown by their example how personal actions can make a significant difference.

AVAILABLE ONLINE ONLY

Strategies for Teaching Online RN-to-BSN Students the Health Impacts of Climate Change, by *Jennifer J. Wasco, DNP, RN, assistant professor of nursing at Chatham University in Pennsylvania.*

Nurses are trusted messengers of health information, and innovative leaders in implementing change who can influence policy; this combination of assets can only be fully realized when all nurses are adequately prepared for the health impacts of climate change. This article details a creative curriculum to educate undergraduate students about the health effects of climate change and to evoke a sense of responsibility for the global population and its collective health. For example, students were challenged to find a peer-reviewed publication supporting the notion that climate change has little or no impact on human health; this exercise helped students understand that overwhelming peer-reviewed evidence supports the reality of climate change, and raised awareness of non-peer-reviewed material by climate change skeptics that is influencing the public. In another assignment, students identified an Indigenous community impacted by climate change and developed a plan for adapting to future impacts; this assignment encouraged students to think creatively about possible solutions and emphasized the current challenges these communities already face.

Building Community Resilience to Mitigate Mental Health Effects of Climate Change, by *Charlotte Connerton, EdD, RN, CNE-BC, Assistant Professor of nursing at the University of Southern Indiana; and Angela K. Wooton, PhD, FNP-C, Assistant Professor of Nursing at the University of Evansville.*

This article addresses an impact of climate change that is often minimized or overlooked: the mental health effects on individual and communities. Extreme shifts in weather such as heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods, and hurricanes cause disruptions to the environment, adversely affecting mental health by heightening stress and anxiety. Long-term drought has been linked to family migration; income insecurity and migration add additional strain on family dynamics, including coping skills. The incidence of PTSD after natural disasters is under-reported and under-treated. There is a significant increase in suicidal ideations following natural disasters, with a correlation between suicidal behaviors or thoughts, loss of property, and high rates of unemployment. Robust social connections can mitigate the mental health effects of environmental disruptions, and are a key component of community resilience. These authors detail ways in which community systems and infrastructure can foster resilience.

THE STUDENT VOICE: Implementing Environmental Sustainability Initiatives in a Metropolitan Nursing School to Address the Impacts of Climate Change, by *Bee Yang, DNP, RN, PHN, Patient Flow Supervisor at Abbott Northwestern Hospital; Shanda Demorest, DNP, RN-BC, PHN, Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing, cardiovascular nurse at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, member of the Executive Committee of Minnesota-based Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate, and leader of the Nurses Climate Challenge; and Breanne Krzyzanowski, MLIS, Population Health and Systems Cooperative Associate at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing.*

Climate change mitigation recommendations for higher education institutions reflect the themes of policy, people, process, and practice. This article reports on a quality improvement project to decrease the carbon footprint of a metropolitan school of nursing that addressed campus processes related to facilities management, energy and water consumption, food services, and transportation. A No-Waste November campaign aimed to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and the human contribution to climate change, and to engage participants to pledge personal goals to reduce waste; the campaign led to a significant increase in the proportion of waste that was properly recycled.

MEDIA REVIEW: *Environmental Health in Nursing*. Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments.

Reviewed by Rachel Kerr, BS, RN, OCN, oncology nurse and environmental advocate.

Rachel Kerr, author of the “Sparkling a Movement” article earlier in this issue, reviews this valuable textbook. She writes, “This text helps nurses return to our historical environmental health roots, and provides a vision of a future in which nurses carry this history forward by promoting human health through caring for environmental health.... Reflecting the work of Florence Nightingale, the book’s perspective contextualizes the environment as a key element that nurses can modify for the benefit of their patients.”