**Benefits of Public Health Nursing**

There are many exciting and rewarding opportunities in public health where the public health nurse works with communities and populations in addition to individual patients and families, to identify health needs, provide services and improve the overall health of their communities. Nurses entering the profession can expect to develop and use skills in the following:

- Independent and critical thinking skills
- Knowledge of nursing and scientific principles
- Expertise in forming partnerships and collaborative relationships
- Skills in reaching out to people and assisting them in making healthy lifestyle choices
- Knowledge in social and behavioral sciences, epidemiology, environmental health, leadership, and finance
- Knowledge regarding Emergency Preparedness
- Knowledge of current treatment modalities and health care delivery systems
- Ethical principles
- Knowledge of health policy, research, and treatment options

Public Health Nurses can help promote growth and change by:

- Being agents of change
- Taking leadership roles within their communities
- Becoming mentors
- Sharing their knowledge, experience, and wisdom
- Using evidence based practice
- Staying abreast of changing technology and information
- Staying abreast of data and health information

Public health administrators and policy-makers must make certain that a trained, committed, and energetic pool of public health nursing professionals is available by advocating for and ensuring:

- An adequate education system to develop an increased number of nurses entering the profession
- Strategies to successfully attract and retain qualified public health nurses including adequate and competitive salaries and benefits
- Cultural and ethnic diversity

Public health nurses in more isolated and rural communities are often the public health director. There is a need for nurses to become leaders and advocates to ensure the development of quality services. Through effective collaboration, public health nurses will continue to support Colorado’s communities and help individuals achieve maximum health. Public Health Nurses must be prepared for new challenges in an ever-changing world.
Public Health Nurses care and work with individuals, families and communities by reaching out and becoming involved in their lives. The American Public Health Association describes public health nursing as: “...the practice of promoting the health of populations using knowledge from nursing, social, and public health sciences.” Public Health Nurses apply their skills to systems, communities and populations in addition to individual patients and families.

**WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING?**

Public Health Nurses provide essential public health functions:

- Monitoring health status to identify community health problems
- Diagnosing and investigating health problems and health hazards in the community
- Informing, educating and empowering people about health issues
- Mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems
- Developing policies and plans that support individuals and community health and ensure safety
- Enforcing laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
- Linking people to needed personal health services and assuring the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable
- Assuring a competent public health and personal health care workforce
- Evaluating effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services

Researching new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

Using new curricula and professional practices, the public health nursing workforce continues to evolve to meet these challenges.

**PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

For more than 100 years, public health nursing has evolved from direct care for ill and vulnerable populations to a much broader mission of promoting health and preventing disease. Public health nursing works to meet the complex health needs of today’s global community. Change is not only inevitable, but it is also integral to a dynamic and interactive process.

The following trends are currently influencing public health nursing practices and are expected to continue to do so in the future:

- Continued emphasis on risk reduction, health promotion and disease prevention
- Enhanced multi-disciplinary efforts and community partnerships addresses complex public health issues
- Required new approaches for threats of global diseases, antibiotic resistant diseases, natural disasters and bioterrorism require new approaches
- Increased diversity in communities’ demographic patterns affects public health nursing practices

Public health nurses must be prepared to address these challenges, and continue to do so in the future:

- Increased accountability is essential to producing continued improvement in health outcomes and assuring continued program funding
- Increased shortage of educated nurses nationwide poses a significant challenge to have adequately prepared staff
- Increased educational and professional opportunities will be available due to expanding technology
- Expanded technology will pose challenges but will make it easier to share information with colleagues, consumers, and organizations around the world

**A TIMELINE OF PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING IN COLORADO**

1870s Colorado State Board of Health established
1893 Lillian Wald identified as first PHN in the nation
1908-1910 T3A Association funding to care for T3 patients
1930s Federal relief funds helped establish traveling clinics
1947 Federal relief funds helped establish traveling clinics from Denver to other parts of the state
1950s Maternal & Child Health (MCH) Act provided funding for well child and maternity clinics, Crippled Children’s Clinics established
1960s Federal Act from 1950 provided funding for clinic services
1970s Neighborhood health clinics established in Colorado
1980s Home care began to privatize
1990s Services include targeting special issues, vulnerable and minority populations
2000s Homelessness, emerging communicable diseases, and drug resistant organisms place greater demands on public health professionals to manage new challenges while working to assure that local public health roles are fulfilled
2008 Colorado Public Health Act passed
2008 Colorado County Nurses become Public Health Directors in many communities
2010 Colorado State Board of Health establishes common guidelines under The Public Health Improvement Act
2010 Timelines are developed which public health plans are developed
2010 Colorado County Nurses become Public Health Directors in many communities
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