The Role of Nursing During Public Health Emergencies & Opportunities for the Future

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August 20, 2020
Nursing is a key profession for disaster preparedness, response and recovery

• Nurses are ideal to serve in a wide variety of roles across the disaster cycle (preparedness, response, recovery). Nursing…
  • Represents the largest segment of the healthcare workforce in the US, and most other countries [1]
  • Is the most trusted profession in the US [2]
  • Comes with a basic skill set that supports rapid engagement in emergency response functional roles as needed
  • Is strongly connected to their communities (58% work in hospitals, 42% community based entities [3])
Emergency vs. disaster

• Emergency: lower magnitude event/disruption that requires immediate response and resources are available to respond

• Disaster: larger magnitude event/disruption that requires response and available resources do not match what is required to respond

• COVID-19 is a public health disaster
Public health emergencies

• NDMS defines a public health emergency as: "a) a disease or disorder [that] presents a public health emergency (PHE); or b) a public health emergency, including significant outbreaks of infectious disease or bioterrorist attacks“ [4]

• COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread illness, as well as social and economic disruption across the US and the world

• Historically, disadvantaged communities are at greater risk in pandemics, and this is also true today [5]

### Public/ Community Health Nurses
- Contact tracing
- Case investigation
- Community assessments
- Community education
- Screening
- Telephone hot line services / telehealth
- POD: Mass vaccination / mass testing
- Home care (direct care, or supervise)
- Mass care center duties
- Community based infection control
- ICS: Many emergency response functional roles

### Acute Care Nurses
- Triage
- Direct patient care (usual or crossover assignments in hospital, alternate or mass care sites)
- Patient/ family education
- Case reporting / syndromic surveillance
- Hospital based infection control

### APRNs
- Diagnose and treat in different settings
- Telehealth
- Surveillance and case reporting
- Develop treatment protocols
- Health education and counseling

### Volunteer organizations
- American Red Cross
- Medical Reserve Corps
- DMAT /teams

### Policy
- Strategic Planning
- Emergency Management
• Overall, professional nurses come to the table with basic skills that support rapid adaptation to a wide variety of emergency response functional roles

• Health system planners often omit planning for the surge capacity staffing of nurses (numbers and types) for acute care AND community settings

• Many of the required skills and capabilities of nurses responding during COVID-19 trace back to basic fundamentals of nursing (infection control, correct use of PPE, therapeutic communication, assessment, teamwork). However, most of nursing education focuses on use of such skills in the acute care setting

• Need to better prepare nurses to work in austere conditions, using crisis standards of care
• Surprising *gap in basic knowledge of epidemiology*--which is required for understanding pandemic prevention, detection and response

• Current *nursing education contains little critical and emergency care content*, this hinders rapid cross assignments and rapid up skilling during surge needs

• Healthcare *worker responder safety is paramount*
  • Appropriate protocols
  • Adequate types and quantities of supplies equipment
  • Appropriate training

• *Leadership and communication is essential*, especially during times of uncertainty & lack of resources; need to assure “care for the care takers”
• Plan for an increase in the numbers and types of pandemics \textit{(urbanization, large social gatherings, mass transit/travel, increased global population density will fuel such increases)}

  • \textbf{Expand undergraduate nursing curricula} to include:
    • Content & clinical rotations through emergency, critical care and public health nursing
    • All hazards disaster preparedness
    • Basic principles of epidemiology

  • \textbf{Review nursing program curricula} in the context of the International Council of Nurses Core Disaster Nursing Competencies (v 2.0, 2019) [7]
    • Where there are gaps, enhance the curriculum
Opportunities for moving forward

• **Continuing education for existing workforce** (practitioners and faculty): disaster management, epidemiology, community based infection control.
  - Develop national CED programs, open access, free of charge. Completion of series can earn a certificate?

• **Convene a national task force to address** development of a model for surge capacity for disaster nursing workforce for all disasters
  - Can be used to guide States

• Advocate for federal funding to support a disaster nursing network across the US (and Affiliated Territories) to seed and develop the field, and implement a plan to assure responder [8,9]

• Use lessons learned from COVID-19 about nursing preparedness to **galvanize national level action** [10]
Conclusion

• The World Health Organization has declared 2020 to be the Year of Nursing and Midwifery

• The roots of modern day nursing are in disaster nursing and community health for the underserved
  • Florence Nightingale was a disaster nurse, with multiple emergency response functional roles: care provider, trainer, manager, statistician, consultant
  • Lilian Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement and was a pioneer in community health nursing and today what we call population health

• Across the globe nurses have been an essential component of COVID-19 pandemic response

• We must remember our roots, and continue to cultivate nursing capacity for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery!
References


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