

# Cornerstones of Public Health Nursing

## **Public Health Nursing Practice:**

- **Focuses on the health of entire populations**
- **Reflects community priorities and needs**
- **Establishes caring relationships with communities, systems, individuals and families**
- **Grounded in social justice, compassion, sensitivity to diversity, and respect for the worth of all people, especially the vulnerable**
- **Encompasses mental, physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental aspects of health**
- **Promotes health through strategies driven by epidemiological evidence**
- **Collaborates with community resources to achieve those strategies, but can and will work alone if necessary**
- **Derives its authority for independent action from the Nurse Practice Act**

## **Cornerstones from Public Health**

Population based  
Grounded in social justice  
Focus on greater good  
Focus on health promotion and prevention  
Does what others cannot or will not  
Driven by the science of epidemiology  
Organizes community resources  
Long-term commitment to the community

## **Cornerstones from Nursing**

Relationship based  
Grounded in an ethic of caring  
Sensitivity to diversity  
Holistic focus  
Respect for the worth of all  
Independent action

# Definitions

## Public Health

Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.<sup>1</sup>

"Public Health is the Science and Art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency through organized community effort for the sanitation of the environment, the control of communicable disease, and the development of the social machinery to insure everyone a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health, so organizing these benefits as to enable every citizen to realize his birthright of health and longevity."<sup>2</sup>

## Nursing

"[Nursing is defined to have] charge of the personal health of somebody... and what nursing has to do... is to put the patient in the best condition for nature to act upon him."<sup>3</sup>

"The unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to his health or recovery (or to peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will, or knowledge. And to do this in such a way as to help him gain independence as rapidly as possible... [The nurse] is temporarily the consciousness of the unconscious, the love of life for the suicidal, the leg of the amputee, the eyes of the newly blind, a means of locomotion for the infant, knowledge and confidence for the young mother, the [voice] for those too weak or withdrawn to speak."<sup>4</sup>

## Public Health Nursing

Public health nursing is the synthesis of the art and science of public health and nursing.<sup>5</sup>

***One good community nurse will save a dozen policemen.***  
*Herbert Hoover*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from The Future of Public Health. National Academy Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> C.E.A. Winslow. The Untilled Field of Public Health, Modern Medicine, Vol. 2. pp. 183-191, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Nightingale, Florence. Notes on Nursing: What It Is and What It Is Not. London: Harrison and Sons, 1859, preface and p.75 (Commemorative Edition, Lippincott, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, VA. Basic principles of nursing care. London: International Council of Nurses, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Cornerstones of Public Health Nursing. Minnesota Department of Health, 1999.

# Applying the Cornerstones to Public Health Nursing Practice

## FOCUSES ON THE HEALTH OF ENTIRE POPULATIONS

### Population

- A population is a collection of individuals who have one or more personal or environmental characteristics in common.
- Population-based interventions are not limited to only those who seek service or who are poor or otherwise vulnerable.

A **population-of-interest** is a population that is essentially healthy but who could improve factors which promote or protect health.

A **population-at-risk** is a population with a common identified risk factor or risk-exposure that poses a threat to health

Examples of populations include:

- All families of newborn infants
- All older adults at risk for falls
- Everyone who drinks well water
- All children at risk for vaccine-preventable disease
- All adolescents at risk for depression

## REFLECTS COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND NEEDS

Population-based practice reflects the priorities of the community. Community priorities are determined through an assessment of the population's health status and a prioritization process.

**Community assessment** is defined as:

The regular and systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on the health of the community; including statistics on health status, awareness of community health needs, and epidemiologic and other studies of health problems.

A community assessment process:

- Assesses the health status of all populations and for all health-related areas in the community, regardless of whether the public health agency has responsibility or programmatic efforts in those areas
- Produces results that serve as the foundation for planning how public health and the community will address public health problems

## **ESTABLISHES CARING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES, SYSTEMS, INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES**

**Caring** is often considered the “art of nursing, that part of nursing which creates the circumstances under which the “curative” parts can happen.

More than just words, intents, beliefs, or values; it encompasses stance, touch, orientation thoughts and feelings fused with physical presence and action.<sup>1</sup>

### **Relationships**

The foundation of any therapeutic or healing activity is the interactions among people, which may be described as **relationship-centered** care. All public health nursing interventions are provided in the context of a relationship. The relationships that public health nurses establish with the communities, families, individuals and systems they serve are grounded in personal integrity, honesty, consistency, and trustworthiness.

*“Nobody cares how much you know  
until they know how much you care.”*

## **GROUNDING IN SOCIAL JUSTICE, COMPASSION, SENSITIVITY TO DIVERSITY, AND RESPECT FOR THE WORTH OF ALL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE**

### **Social Justice**

Public health nurses’ commitment to the communities, families, and individuals they serve emanate from a combination of the passion underlying their social justice beliefs that all persons regardless of circumstances are entitled equally to a basic quality of life.

“Social justice is the foundation of public health... that invincible human spirit that led so many of us to enter the field of public health in the first place: a spirit of that has a compelling desire to make the world a better place, free of misery, inequity, and preventable suffering, a world in which we all can live, love, work, play, ail, and die with our dignity intact and our humanity cherished.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Compassion**

“The nurse is temporarily the consciousness of the unconscious, the love of life for the suicidal, the leg of the amputee, the eyes of the newly blind, a means of locomotion for the infant, knowledge and confidence for the young mother, the (voice) for those too weak or withdrawn to speak.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Benner, Christine Tanner, Catherine Chesla. Adapted from Expertise in Nursing Practice: Caring, Clinical Judgment, and Ethics. New York: Springer, 1996: p.233.

<sup>2</sup> Krieger and Birn, Editorial, AJP, November 1997

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, VA. Basic principles of nursing care. London: International Council of Nurses, 1961.

## **Sensitivity to Diversity**

- Values cultural diversity in communities
- Possesses capacity for cultural self-assessment and competence in adapting to diversity.

## **Respect for the worth of all people, especially the vulnerable**

Vulnerable populations are populations at risk of poor physical, psychological, or social health.

## **ENCOMPASSES MENTAL, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH**

Definition of holistic nursing:

“All nursing practice that has healing the whole person as its goal.”<sup>1</sup>

Historical precedents:

“The work we are speaking of has to do with maintaining health by removing things which disturb it... dirt, drink, diet, damp, and drains.”<sup>2</sup>

“Appalled at the conditions she found among the wives of the soldiers she tended, i.e., respectable women, living in 3-4 rooms of the damp basement of a hospital, where a fever broke out. In this place the sick were attended and 22 babies born.”

Ms. Nightingale:

- Procured a house
- Had it cleaned and furnished
- Organized a plan to give employment to soldiers' wives
- Started a school for the children
- Got a chaplain to visit the families and help them
- Advocated in her writings that the wives and children not be forgotten when planning for the soldiers<sup>3</sup>

Lillian Wald envisioned the Henry Street Settlement as an opportunity to “unite people through their human and spiritual interests.” As a result, the Settlement continually expanded to meet the needs of its community by supplementing the nursing activities with social programs that included:

- Dramatic activities
- Vocational training for boys and girls
- Three kindergartens
- Classes in carpentry, sewing, art, diction, music, and dance
- Clubs for boys, girls, men, young women, and mothers
- A drama club with its own theater
- Summer camps for children at a Settlement-owned farm

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<sup>1</sup> American Holistic Nurses Association.

<sup>2</sup> Florence Nightingale.

<sup>3</sup> Whall. *The Family as the Unit of Care*. Public Health Nursing. Volume 3. December, 1986.

- Two large scholarship funds
- Study rooms staffed with people to help children with their homework
- Playgrounds for children
- A neighborhood library<sup>1</sup>

**PROMOTES HEALTH THROUGH STRATEGIES DRIVEN  
BY EPIDEMIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

**Levels of prevention**

- Primary – promotes health and prevents problems before they occur
- Secondary – detects and treats problems early
- Tertiary – limits further negative effects from a problem

**Epidemiology**

- Describes the health status of populations
- Explains the causes of diseases
- Predicts the occurrence of disease
- Controls the distribution of disease

**COLLABORATES WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE THOSE  
STRATEGIES, BUT CAN AND WILL WORK ALONE IF NECESSARY**

**Can and will work alone if others are unable or choose not to work on an issue**

- Protecting the health of the public is a fundamental responsibility of government
- Core government functions of public health: Assessment, Policy Development & Assurance

**DERIVES ITS AUTHORITY FOR INDEPENDENT ACTION  
FROM THE NURSE PRACTICE ACT**

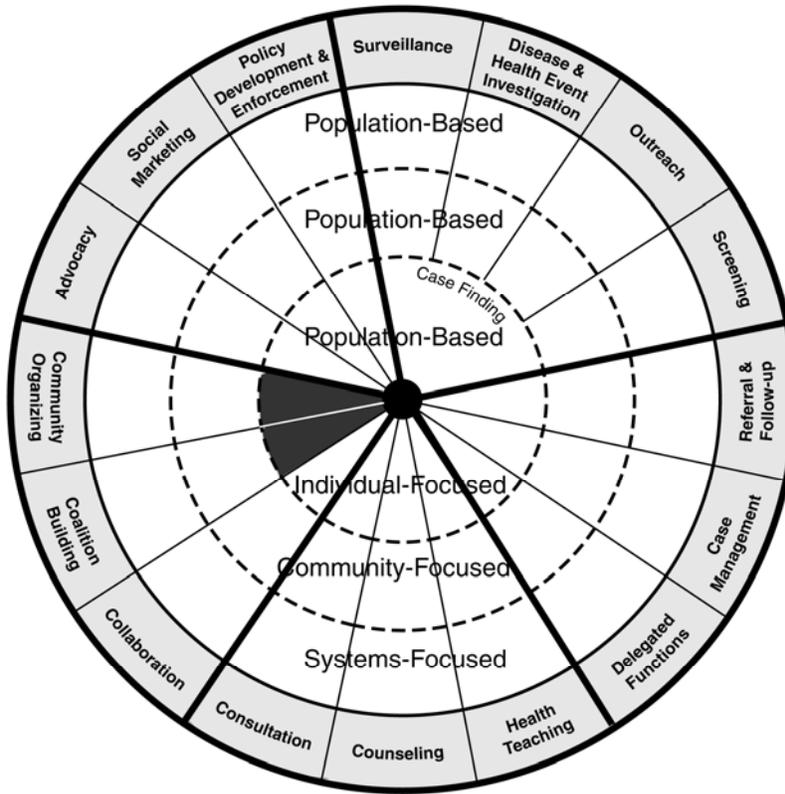
- Legally established scope of practice
- Broad authority for action
- Professionally guided standards and expectations

**Cornerstones**

- Endure across time and place
- Underlying meaning of our work
- Provides guidance and direction for our practice

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<sup>1</sup> [www.jwa.org/Jwa-1999/exhibit98/wald](http://www.jwa.org/Jwa-1999/exhibit98/wald)



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