

Nurse partnerships to improve integrated responses in vulnerable populations

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Natural and technological disasters have underscored the realization that “natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and acts of terrorism can happen anywhere at any time” (Zwirn, Gee, Meece-Hinh & Muehlenkord, 2006, p. 56). Nurses have an important role in recognizing and responding to disasters. Each nursing specialty has expertise that could be leveraged to respond quickly where people live, work, attend school, and receive healthcare. Policy considerations regarding healthcare capacity across the continuum, particularly for vulnerable populations, will be discussed. Strengthening partnerships among nursing specialties could enhance an integrated and nimble response to known, unknown, and emerging threats. For example, partnerships between occupational health nurses (OHNs) and school nurses could improve threat detection and community response. In the United States, an estimated 73,697 school nurses provide leadership in the provision of health care in the school setting for 55.6 million school children and 7.2 million adult employees. Children are more vulnerable to hazards than adults for physiological, developmental, and behavioral reasons. A literature review regarding what is known about children in a public health crisis revealed themes, including: 1) Children with special health care needs are particularly vulnerable due to system issues; and 2) Children may become separated from family members due to societal disruption which increases the vulnerability of the children. OHN/school nurse partnerships could improve school staff training, equipment and disaster plans. Emergency room, pediatric, and public health nurses also could partner with OHNs to decrease adverse effects of hazards in the pediatric population.

Biography

Charlotte Sortedahl is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She has a clinical background in emergency room nursing and transplant nursing and served as a county Health Officer/Public Health Director. She has a Doctorate of Nursing Practice, Masters of Public Health in Environmental and Occupational Health Nursing, a Master of Science, and a BSN from the University of Minnesota. Currently she is a member of the University of Minnesota School of Public Health Alumni board. Her areas of expertise includes evidence-based practice, leadership, needs assessments, journal clubs, and public health.

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