

*Guest Column***VOLUNTEERISM INCORPORATED INTO NURSING CURRICULUM**

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Volunteerism appeals to the basic belief of nurses, in their desire to make a positive impact on individuals and society as a whole. Due to economic changes in health care delivery, volunteerism and community involvement have become a natural extension of health and wellness services. Therefore, incorporation of community health services as volunteer work can be a win-win for both student nurse and community.

As society ages, the demand for quality nurses continues to grow. The number of students accepted into a nursing program is often dictated by the availability of clinical experiences and viable clinical sites. Access to objective specific clinical sites in rural areas can be difficult to secure. The utilization of nursing students in community health can help to fill the workforce void in the community while providing nursing schools with valuable clinical sites and exceptional learning opportunities.

History supports volunteerism in nursing. Early nursing pioneers such as Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton volunteered in times of war and disaster. Many nurses continue that same tradition by creating outreach clinics and even national health organizations. Nursing volunteers have a strong commitment to continue to contribute to world health by serving others for designated hours, days, weeks or months.

Nursing schools, who have integrated nursing education with public education programs, have discovered that volunteerism can serve as an excellent learning opportunity for pre-licensure nursing students. Nursing programs integrating objective specific volunteerism into nursing curriculum have found positive results in promoting the well-being of community members while preparing students for population-focused prevention within the community in which they reside.

The literature relates examples of integrating volunteerism as a service learning approach. In many states, budget cuts have influenced school systems in hiring adequate numbers of school nurses. In the current economic climate, government funding has been limited to many public and private systems. Schwartz and Laughlin (2008) discuss the use of public schools in Nebraska by Creighton University School of Nursing to enhance their pediatric clinical component. The end result was a positive outcome for all involved, including a health benefit to the community and multiple health child learning strategies and competencies for the student nurse.

Furthermore, according to Rojak, Frederickson, Fitpold, and Uhlken (2001) using community projects is a good way to inspire volunteerism in nurses. Participation by occupational and environmental health nurses in community initiatives provides personal satisfaction and increased visibility for the profession of nursing.

Long, at a seminar for nurse managers in 1998, discussed how volunteerism provided an avenue to improve the health status of our citizens. Through her strong commitment to volunteerism, Long created the first outreach clinic in Atlanta and now advocates for a national community population. Long stated: "...understanding the concept of community is crucial to improving the health status of our citizens".

**Why** should nursing programs incorporate volunteerism into the nursing curriculum? The answer to why may be dependent on the individual needs of the nursing program. Here are a few why's to consider:

- Volunteerism strengthens community relations. Relationships are initiated and nurtured through direct contact nurse to client and nurse to family.
- Volunteerism fills a gap in health services. Volunteerism, especially during state and federal budget cuts, may be the only gap filler for those in need of health services. We know that employers are not mandated to provide full health coverage for employees, leaving many (including nurses in all career ladders) without access to affordable health services. Volunteer nurses can be utilized to assist with health screenings and basic health needs.
- Volunteerism provides abundant opportunities for student nurses to identify and present health teaching. These teachable moments are beneficial to the individual as well as providing a boost in the confidence of the student nurse.
- Volunteerism allows expert nurses in the field to act as mentors to the novice student nurse.
- Volunteerism instills social responsibility and more volunteerism. Nursing is a service profession, requiring a giving of oneself to serve in the community. According to Fay (2008), the Corporation for National and Community Service reports that nearly nine out of ten young people who give time to volunteering have parents and siblings who also volunteer. The added benefit for being a volunteer is raising children to be caring individuals.
- Volunteerism provides an added experiential clinical site to the list of affiliating agencies. Approximately 12.4% of the US population is now older than 65 years of age. This will increase to 20% once the baby boomers come of age (Wold, 2008). To meet the demand for nurses, nursing schools are expanding programs and class numbers. While classrooms thrive, the clinical resources become limited and evening and weekend clinical rotations are now common place. In order to provide meaningful and quality experiences to students, nurse educators must find the best clinical sites. Perhaps those sites are waiting right here, in the community.

**When** could volunteerism be introduced into the nursing curriculum? Volunteerism may be introduced during any course of the nursing curriculum. For example; a blood pressure screening during Nursing Fundamentals, Well-child clinic in Maternal-Child Nursing, Geriatric Home Assessment and Safety review during Community Health Nursing, Teaching Booths at Community Health Fairs for Medical-Surgical-Oncology Nursing, and even Short-term medical trips to other states and/or countries during term break or summer semester.

**How** to incorporate volunteerism into the clinical curriculum is up to the individual nursing program. Initially, you may choose to use volunteerism as an adjunct assignment for clinical make-up time. Writing specific nursing objectives and goals is the key to making volunteerism successful in your curriculum. For example, do not send a student to the American Red Cross to randomly volunteer time. Walking donors to the nourishment table is not a beneficial nursing objective but through training and certification the student may perform health interviews or hemoglobin checks.

**Where** are the community volunteer opportunities? Public and private schools, senior centers, National health organizations (American Red Cross, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, etc.), Americorps, Churches (Perish Nurses), Day Care Centers....the possibilities are endless. Be flexible, creative, and think outside of the box.

**In Summary**, by incorporating volunteerism into the nursing curriculum, nurse educators are encouraging students to work hand-in-hand with people living in their own communities. Volunteerism adds **quality** to the nursing curriculum and becomes a win-win for both the students and the communities in which they serve.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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