

Friday, May 29, 2009

SON and Detroit's public health department plan for disaster

New training courses in disaster preparedness techniques will be available to nurses in the community late this year. The program was created by the Detroit Community Health Nursing Institute, which is a partnership between Oakland University's School of Nursing and Detroit's Health and Wellness Promotion.

In the wake of tragedies such as September 11, post-911 Anthrax attacks and Hurricane Katrina, health care leaders throughout the United States took a closer look within their communities and asked a tough question: Were they sufficiently prepared to handle a large scale public health crisis in their own backyards?

Tackling that question for the Detroit area are Linda Thompson Adams, dean of SON and Gwendolyn Franklin, director for the Office of Nursing for the Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion, an organization formed through a 2006 Detroit disaster readiness advisory board as a spin-off from a leadership development training program conducted through the Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowships Program.

The program provides opportunities for health professionals to influence health care and health care policy at national, state and local levels.

Although public health departments were originally established to address disease outbreaks, changing needs dictate that the public health's role be modernized to protect citizens from newer forms of danger, such as bioterrorism. The board's primary focus on disaster preparedness is to enhance the role of nurses in the community.

"The role of public health is broad, with so many pieces to it," Franklin said. "With a community-based approach, we can effectively tie all the community's nursing agencies into one coordinated [disaster preparedness] effort."

For the new institute's staff, there was one enormous task at the top of the to-do list: design the best possible emergency preparedness and response training program for area nurses. In pooling experience from the nation's tenth-largest public health department with resources from the SON, a workable plan took root.

"There are nurses throughout our community who want to help in times of crisis," Franklin said. "Now we have clearly defined this new role and developed a comprehensive training program for them. Whether retired nurses, nursing students or nurse aides at local nursing homes, all community nurses can be part of this important mission."

The training classes prepare nurses for a wide range of possible health emergencies within southeast Michigan, including biological, environmental or weather related events. Faculty and consultants from SON developed the curriculum built on best practices in training.

"Our ever-changing world requires that education keeps pace," Adams said. "Terrorism, disease and natural disasters won't wait on a curriculum overhaul. Through our partnership with Health and Wellness Promotion, we have a streamlined approach to educate our nursing work force. This ensures we're ready to handle any health care crisis that comes our way."

The training program is based on a set of emergency preparedness core competencies developed by Kristine Gebbie, director for the Columbia University School of Nursing Center for Health Policy. Additionally, OU professionals applied competencies from the International Nursing Coalition for Mass Casualty Education at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing.

"Nurses are expected to be first responders because they are uniquely equipped to handle a medical crisis," Franklin said. "They will be deployed into the community to establish our neighborhood help centers, where victims can go for treatment during times of disaster."

The number of help centers will depend on the need and type of disaster. Located in area schools, the centers will provide a comprehensive array of services, including triage, first aid, vaccinations, community resources for counseling and mental health services and health screenings. As a crucial part of their training, nurses will participate in ongoing local and statewide practice drills.

With every training class they attend and each practice drill they participate in, Detroit's nurses will be prepping to step onto new front lines here at home — to willingly serve a public that continues to trust them.

SUMMARY

New training courses in disaster preparedness techniques will be available to nurses in the metro Detroit community late this year, created through a partnership with OU's SON.

Created by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Friday, May 29, 2009
Modified by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Friday, May 29, 2009
Article Start Date: Friday, May 29, 2009