

## NSNA – Leading the Way as a Beacon for The Luminary Project

Karen A. Ballard, MA, RN, FAAN



Nurses have long appreciated that a healthy environment impacts the health of individuals, families, communities, and populations. This understanding is an essential underpinning of nursing practice.

It is well-documented that every one of us is carrying an unprecedented body burden of toxic chemicals; children are more susceptible to environmental exposures than adults; fetuses may be harmed by amounts of chemicals that do not affect adults, and sick patients or the elderly may be less able to deal with environmental exposures. Some of the disturbing data in the U.S. includes: autism has increased from less than 3 per 10,000 children in the 1970s to more than 30 per 10,000 in this century (Merrick, Kandel, & Morad, 2004); 1 in 6 children now has a learning or developmental disability (Trasande & Landrigan, 2004); in the 1940s, a woman's lifetime risk for breast cancer was 1 in 22, while today the risk is

1 in 7 (American Cancer Society, 2005); the incidence of hypospadias has doubled over the last two decades (Landrigan, 2004); the prevalence of asthma has doubled between 1982 (34.8%) and 2003 (69.4%) (Trasande & Landrigan, 2004); and biomonitoring studies show that 1 in 10 women have mercury blood levels that pose a threat of neurological damage to a fetus (CDC, 2010). Our world is not a "healthy place" for humans, animals, plants, or nature.

Environmental health has been defined as "freedom from illness or injury related to exposure to toxic agents and other environmental conditions that are detrimental to human health" (Pope, Snyder, & Mood, 1995, p. 3). In the American Nurses Association's (ANA) *Code of Ethics for Nurses*, there is a clear imperative for nurses to accept responsibility, not only for the specific health needs of their patients, but also for broader health concerns such as environmental pollution, lack of access to health care, violation of human rights, world hunger, and the inequitable distribution of health resources (ANA, 2001). In order to assist nurses in incorporating environmental health principles into their practice, ANA has prepared *Principles of Environmental Health for Nursing Practice with Implementation Strategies* (ANA, 2007).

### Health Care Without Harm

"First Do No Harm" is a credo well-known to nursing students and health care professionals. Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), together with its many partners around the world,

shares a vision of a health care sector that does "no harm," and instead promotes the health of people and the environment. To that end, HCWH is working to implement ecologically sound and healthy alternatives to health care practices that pollute the environment and contribute to disease (HCWH, n.d.). One of HCWH's founding members was the American Nurses Association and since the beginning, registered nurses have been active participants in the organization and its Nurses Workgroup.

### The Luminary Project

HCWH has established *The Luminary Project: Nurses Lighting the Way to Environmental Health*, a Web-based, virtual community (<http://www.theluminaryproject.org/>) that captures the stories of nurses' activities to improve human health by improving the health of the environment. These shining stories demonstrate how nurses are creatively and strategically addressing environmental problems and illuminating the way toward safer hospitals and health care environments; communities with clean air, land, and water; and children born without toxic chemicals in their bodies or exposures through

*Karen A. Ballard, MA, RN, FAAN, is a Consultant to The Luminary Project of Health Care Without Harm. She is a psychiatric-mental health Clinical Nurse Specialist and a Nursing Consultant on health care, environmental health, and nursing practice issues. Ms. Ballard is the President of the New York State Nurses Association (2009-2011). For more information about The Luminary Project of Health Care Without Harm, contact [KBallard@nyc.rr.com](mailto:KBallard@nyc.rr.com).*

contaminated breast milk. A version documenting the impressive work of nurses in Spanish-speaking countries is also available – *Proyecto Luminarias* (<http://www.proyectoluminaria.org/>).

Some of the stories chronicled on The Luminary Project Web site include:

- Establishing “quiet hours” on patient care units
- Bringing back the “quiet zone” as envisioned more than 100 years ago by Florence Nightingale throughout a medical center via a hospital-wide program – Silent Hospitals Help Healing (SHHH)
- Establishing battery recycling programs for the hospital, its staff, and the community
- Encouraging the purchase and use of only environmentally-safe cleaning and disinfecting products
- Assessing the impact of pesticides and other environmental exposures on children’s growth, neurodevelopment, and rates of respiratory disease
- Decreasing the use of fragrances in hospitals, by staff, and in communities
- Providing safe working conditions for employees in high-risk occupations
- Responding to natural and man-made disasters that create environmental problems
- Educating others on how pollution affects the natural world and the health of human populations

### **NSNA Becomes a Beacon**

The Luminary Project is a collaboration of nurses and nursing organizations including the *Guiding Lights* – a constellation of nurses and those supporting nurses in their practice and advocacy roles – and the *Beacons* – nursing, nursing specialty, and other organizations that have agreed to illuminate and support nurses as environmental health activists and advance the project. In 2009, the National Student Nurses’ Association (NSNA) passed a resolution, *In Support of Increasing Environmental Health Advocacy and Education*, which called for environmental health awareness by nursing students, the inclusion of environmental health education into nursing curricula, and for NSNA to become a *Beacon* of The Luminary Project (NSNA, 2009). HCWH appreciates this support and commitment to environmental health from the nursing students of the United States.

In order for nursing students to understand the impact of the environment upon the health of individuals, families, communities, populations, and the earth, it is important that environmental principles be consistently integrated into classroom and clinical experiences and the research endeavors of nursing students.

Each year, The Luminary Project provides an opportunity for nursing students to write an essay on the modern environmental health movement and the role of the nursing profession and nurses. Students are asked to identify a specific activity that demonstrates the nurse’s role as an environmental health activist by discussing such issues as advocating for clean water, air, or food; promoting reduce, reuse, recycle, or reprocess policies in their workplaces; or supporting populations that are vulnerable to environmental pollutants. The winning student receives the Hollie Shaner McRae Nursing Student Essay Award at the annual CleanMed meeting, an international conference to catalyze environmental improvements in the health care sector.

### **Environmental Hazards in Health Care**

In health care, nurses and nursing students are exposed on a daily basis to environmental hazards such as: biological (TB, anthrax, HIV, hepatitis); chemical (drugs, disinfectants, sterilants); ergonomic (lifting, transfers); stress/violence (short staffing, shift rotate); and physical hazards (radiation, heat, noise). In order for nursing students to understand the impact of the environment upon the health of individuals, families, communities, populations, and the earth, it is important that environmental principles be consistently integrated into classroom and clinical experiences and the research endeavors of undergraduate, masters, and doctoral level nursing students. Particularly helpful are outreach projects for the students such as hospital-sponsored Greenmarkets, Day on a Farm, in a Manufacturing Plant, in a Grocery Store, Drug Take-Back Days, or community-based activities focusing on an environmental concern.

One example of how to integrate environmental health into a community health nursing curriculum is a

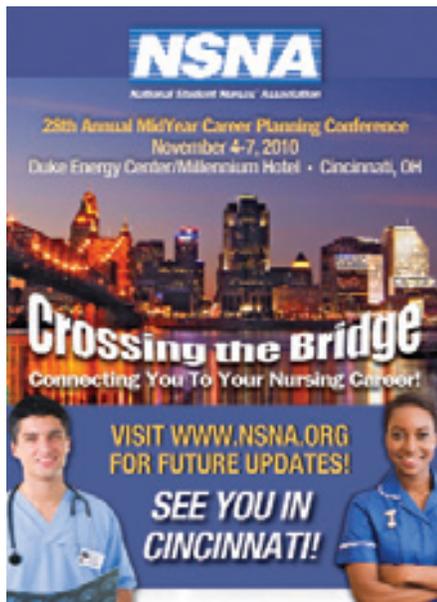
joint project of Thomas Jefferson University in Pittsburgh and the Women’s Health & Environmental Network (WHEN). The content is designed to show students the connection between themselves, their health, and the environment. One assignment requires the students to review a cinematic presentation of an environmental health issue in the community and then explain what they would do to correct the problem and what they might do to prevent it. Another project is for the students to identify an environmental health issue within their community. They are required to locate a legislative bill that addresses that health issue and write to the sponsor of that bill to either support the bill in its current state or make recommendations to amend the bill. All students are to complete a community assessment project, which is a major portion of their grade. It requires them to identify a real health issue in their community, research other places such a problem exists, find out what was done about it, and recommend a realistic intervention. The students then present this project to the school in a formal poster presentation forum. Assignments like these open students’ eyes to the range and importance of environmental health issues.

### **Conclusion**

Let us reflect on the assurance from the International Council of Nurses (ICN): “The concern of nurses is for people’s health – its promotion, its maintenance, its restoration. The healthy lives of people depend ultimately on the health of Planet Earth – its soil, its water, its oceans, its atmosphere, its biological diversity – all of the elements which constitute people’s natural environment” (ICN, 1992, p. 1). **DN**

## References

- American Cancer Society. (2005). *Detailed guide: Breast cancer – What are the risk factors for breast cancer?* Retrieved from [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI\\_2\\_4\\_2X\\_What\\_are\\_the\\_risk\\_factors\\_for\\_breast\\_cancer\\_5.asp?si-tearea=](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_2X_What_are_the_risk_factors_for_breast_cancer_5.asp?si-tearea=)
- American Nurses Association (ANA). (2001). *Code of ethics for nurses with interpretative statements*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Publishing.
- American Nurses Association (ANA). (2007). *ANA's principles of environmental health for nursing practice with implementation strategies*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2010). *Fourth national report on human exposure to environmental chemicals*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/>
- Health Care Without Harm (HCWH). (n.d.). *Health Care Without Harm homepage*. Retrieved from <http://www.noharm.org/>
- International Council of Nurses (ICN). (1992). *Position on nurses and the natural environment*. Geneva: Author.
- Landrigan, P.J. (2004). *Environmental health threats to children: A look at the facts* [Electronic version]. New York, NY: INFORM. Retrieved from <http://www.informinc.org/enchil.pdf>
- Merrick, J., Kandel, I., & Morad, M. (2004). Trends in autism. *International Journal of Adolescent Medical Health, 16*(1), 75-78.
- National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). (2009). *In support of increasing health advocacy and education*. Brooklyn, NY: Author.
- Pope, A.M., Snyder, M.A., & Mood, L. (Eds.). (1995). *Nursing, health and the environment – Strengthening the relationship to improve the public's health*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Trasande, L., & Landrigan, P.J. (2004). The National Children's Study: A critical national investment. *Environmental Health Perspectives, 2*(14), A789-790.



### Attention Deans/Directors:

Watch your e-mail for a link to NSNA's Deans and Directors Survey. Your participation is important to the success of the survey. Thank you!

## New Resources for Faculty

*From the Geropsychiatric Nursing Collaborative, a project supported by the John A. Hartford Foundation and housed at the American Academy of Nursing:*

The Geropsychiatric Nursing Collaborative, in collaboration with key stakeholders, has developed the following resources to draw attention to the special needs of older adults with mental health concerns and psychiatric/substance misuse disorders.

- *Geropsychiatric Nursing Competency Enhancements*. These enhancements are not intended to stand alone, but rather to enhance existing or to-be-developed competencies by relevant professional nursing organizations.
- *Key Concepts*. These concepts are foundational to the geropsychiatric nursing competency enhancements.
- *Definition of Geropsychiatric Nursing*. This definition serves to guide future discussions about preparing nurses to care for older adults with mental health concerns.

**Source:** Beck, C., Buckwalter, K., & Evans, L. (2010). *Geropsychiatric nursing competency enhancements*. POGOe – Portal of Geriatric Online Education. Retrieved from <http://www.pogoe.org/productid/20660>

**Note:** To view a description of the documents available, please see <http://www.pogoe.org/product/20660>. You must have an account to view the actual documents, but registration is free. Once you have registered and are logged in, either search for "20660" or click the link under *Recent Products*. Questions? Contact:

Pamela M. Dudzick, MPP  
Program Associate, BAGNC  
Project Coordinator, Geropsychiatric Nursing Collaborative  
[pdudzick@aannet.org](mailto:pdudzick@aannet.org)  
[www.aannet.org/GPNCgeropsych](http://www.aannet.org/GPNCgeropsych)

*The National Student Nurses' Association, Inc. has endorsed these Geropsychiatric Nursing Competency Enhancements. Related NSNA Resolutions adopted by the NSNA House of Delegates over the past 10 years include:*

### 2010

In Support of Increased Primary Care Health Access Among the Geriatric Population  
In Support of Increasing Awareness and Advocacy for the Priority Patient Safety Areas from the Institute of Medicine (IOM)

### 2009

In Support of Awareness and Prevention of Elder Abuse  
In Support of Increasing Awareness and Evaluating Competency of Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Care  
In Support of the Reduction of Unnecessary Noise in Health Care Facilities  
In Support of Herpes Zoster Vaccination of Adults Over 60 Years of Age

### 2008

In Support of Nationally Recognized End-of-Life Orders Including Advance Directives

### 2007

In Support of Increased Awareness and Education of Health Care Professionals Regarding Timely Referrals to Hospice Care for All Terminally Ill Patients

### 2003

In Support of Cultural Competence Education to be Included in Nursing Curricula  
In Continued Support of Improving the Safety of Older Adults in All Health Care Settings Through a Reduction in the Use of Physical Restraints

### 2002

In Support of Public Awareness of Immunization Needs Among Older Adults  
In Support of Enhancing and Increasing Palliative Care Education

### 2001

In Support of Senior Fall Prevention Education  
In Support of Research Related to Measuring Pain in the Cognitively Impaired Adult

**Note:** To view all of the Resolutions Passed by the NSNA House of Delegates, visit <http://www.nсна.org/Publications/Resolutions.aspx>.

**Editor**

Carol A. Fetters Andersen, MSN, RN

**President, NSNA**

Carylin M. Holsey

**Executive Director**

Diane Mancino, EdD, RN, CAE

**Art Director**

Jack Bryant

**Managing Editor**

Katie R. Brownlow, ELS

**Graphic Artist**

Melody Edwards

**Publisher**

Anthony J. Jannetti

**Advisory Board 2009-2010**

G. Rumay Alexander, EdD, RN

Michael L. Evans, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN

Florence L. Huey, MS, FNP

Mary P. Tarbox, EdD, RN

Rebecca M. Wheeler, MA, RN

**DEAN'S Notes** is indexed in the Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature.

*DEAN'S Notes* is published five times a year (September/October, November/December, January/February, March/April, and May/June) by Anthony J. Jannetti Inc., East Holly Avenue, Box 56, Pitman, New Jersey 08071-0056. Telephone 856.256.2300. FAX 856.589.7463. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written permission of the publisher. Address changes should include mailing label and be forwarded to the publisher.

Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc.  
East Holly Avenue, Box 56  
Pitman, NJ 08071-0056

CHANGE SERVICE  
REQUESTED

PRSR STD  
US Postage  
PAID  
Deptford, NJ  
Permit #142

© Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc., 2010

## QSEN: Quality and Safety Education for Nurses

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has funded the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) project for three phases to date. The overall goal through all phases of QSEN is to address the challenge of preparing future nurses with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) necessary to continuously improve the quality and safety of the health care systems in which they work.

The National Student Nurses' Association encourages nursing program curriculum committees and faculty to review the QSEN Learning Modules and faculty resources now available through the QSEN Web site (<http://www.qsen.org>) as part of Phase III of the project.

The QSEN Learning Module series was designed to help both new and experienced faculty integrate the Quality and Safety competencies into their nursing programs. Each module explores a particular topic or issue, provides resources, and raises questions to engage users in expanding or

strengthening the learning experiences they create with students around quality and safety.

In the introductory video (<http://www.qsen.org/modules/>), Dr. Pam Ironside (developer and editor of the module series) provides an overview of this resource.

### **QSEN Learning Module One is now available online.**

*Appreciating the Complexity of Nursing Work – Implications for Nursing Education*

This module will assist you to understand nursing work through exploring principles of complexity science and properties of complex adaptive systems. You will recognize the complexity factors characteristic of current health care environments and obtain a new appreciation for the competencies required of RNs, both new and experienced, in delivering safe and quality care in these settings.

### **QSEN Learning Modules Two-Six will be coming soon.**

The Learning Modules were developed as part of the Phase III

QSEN grant funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (<http://www.rwjf.org>). In Phase III, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing and American Association of Colleges of Nursing will work to develop the faculty expertise necessary for the nation's nursing schools to teach the competencies; focus on instilling the competencies in textbooks, licensing, accreditation and certification standards; and promote continued innovation in teaching the competencies.

### **The six competencies are patient-centered care, teamwork and collaboration, evidence-based practice, quality improvement, safety, and informatics.**

Linda Cronenwett, PhD, FAAN, Dean of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing, is the project's principal investigator. Dr. Cronenwett is leading Phase III of the project with Geraldine P. Bednash, PhD, RN, FAAN, Executive Director of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. **DN**