



Nursing Practice and Environmental Advocacy

A Role for Nurses



Florence Nightingale

“No amount of medical knowledge will lessen the accountability for nurses to do what nurses do, that is, manage the environment to promote positive life processes.”
(Notes on Nursing)

An Inconvenient Truth – Al Gore

- “Our recent nature hike through the Book of Revelations” includes:
 - Record-breaking heat waves
 - Melting glaciers
 - Drowning polar bears
 - Drought, typhoons, tsunamis, tornadoes
 - Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and others

Institute of Medicine (1995)

- Nurses are well-positioned for addressing environmental health concerns of individuals and communities. Nurses are the largest group of health professionals. Environmental health is a good fit with the values of the nursing profession regarding disease prevention and social justice and nurses are trusted by the public.

Nurses & the Environment

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

Our Body Burden

- The current chemical burden of individuals is unprecedented in human history. There are approximately **100,000 chemicals** now used in energy production, manufacturing, and consumer products. Almost all are manmade with **15,000** of them produced annually in quantities greater than **10,000 pounds** and **2,800** in quantities greater than **1 million pounds** a year. Of the **2,800**, only **7%** have been tested for developmental effects and **only 43%** have been tested for human health effects.

(Louisville Charter for Safer Chemicals)

What We Know

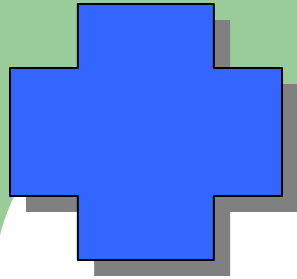
- Every one of us is carrying a body burden of toxic chemicals
- Children are more susceptible to environmental exposures than adults
- The fetus may be harmed by amounts of chemicals that do not effect adults
- Already sick patients, especially the immuno-compromised, and the elderly may be less able to deal with environmental exposures

More What We Know

- In the U.S. the prevalence of asthma doubled between 1982 (34.8) and 2003 (69.4).
- Autism increased from less than 3 per 10,000 in the 1970s to more than 30 per 10,000 in the 1990s.
- 1 in 6 children now have a learning or developmental disability.
- In 1940, a women's lifetime risk from breast cancer in was 1 in 22, today the risk is 1 in 7.
- The incidence of hypospadias has doubled over the last two decades.

Still More What We Know

- The Centers for Disease Control's biomonitoring studies show that 1 in 10 women have mercury blood levels that poses a threat of neurological damage to their fetus.
- In 2005, EWG study of neonatal cord blood detected 287 chemicals: 180 known to cause cancer in humans or animals; 217 known or suspected of being toxic to the brain or nervous system.
- In 2007, EWG released a study of nurses' health and chemical exposures.



NURSES' HEALTH

A Survey on Health & Chemical Exposure



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