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Nurses cannot afford to ignore health inequalities: A qualitative study

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Background: Nurses have long been identified as key contributors to strategies to reduce inequalities in health. However, health inequalities increased in the UK despite measures put in place to reduce them. This raises questions about: 1) the effectiveness of strategies to reduce health inequalities, and 2) nurses' understanding of how inequalities in health are created and sustained, their nature and level of contribution to reducing inequalities, and their preparedness in terms of political consciousness and/or educational preparation.

Aim: The aim of this qualitative research project is to determine nurses' understanding of public health as a strategy to reduce inequalities in health.

Methods: 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted with higher education institution-based public health nurse educators.

Findings: Public health nurse educators described inequalities in health as the foundation on which a public health framework should be built. Two distinct views emerged of how inequalities should be tackled: some proposed a population approach focusing on upstream preventive strategies, whilst others proposed behavioural approaches focusing on empowering vulnerable individuals to improve their own health.

Conclusion: Despite upstream interventions to reduce inequalities in health being proved to have more leverage than individual behavioural interventions in tackling the fundamental causes of inequalities, nurses are likely to perform individual interventions rather than take population approaches.

Biography

Andi Mabhala: is a reviewer for the National Institute of Health Research, International Journal of Preventive Medicine; and International Journal for Public Health research and environment. He is a senior research fellow at Newman University and Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health. He was an invited speaker at the "UK public health Festival in Manchester in 4 July 2013, presented a research paper at the International Public Health Conference in Kuching, Malaysia in August 2013. He contributed several chapters in Key Concepts in Public Health wrote several (2009), London: Sage edited book Key concepts in public health (2009) London: Sage. He contributed a chapter "Policy Drivers" in Key Concepts in Palliative Care (2010). London: Sage. His recent book is "Health Improvement and wellbeing" due to be published in October 2014.

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