

The Intersection of Nursing and Environmental Health - A Call to Action for Sustainable Practices

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Description

The intersection of nursing and environmental health represents a critical nexus where the well-being of individuals and the planet converge. This article explores the imperative for nurses to embrace sustainable practices, recognizing the profound impact of environmental factors on health. It issues a compelling call to action for the nursing community to champion initiatives that promote both individual and planetary health through sustainable healthcare practices. Nurses witness firsthand the effects of poor air quality on respiratory health. From increased rates of asthma to exacerbations of chronic respiratory conditions, the quality of the air individuals breathe directly influences their well-being. Nurses must advocate for policies that reduce air pollution and promote clean energy alternatives. Contaminated water sources contribute to preventable diseases, placing a burden on healthcare systems. Nurses, often on the front lines, can address water quality issues by advocating for clean water access, educating communities on water sanitation, and supporting initiatives that protect water resources [1].

Nurses can advocate for and contribute to the development of environmentally friendly healthcare facilities. From energy-efficient designs to waste reduction initiatives, green healthcare facilities not only reduce environmental impact but also contribute to a healing environment for patients. The healthcare industry generates significant waste, contributing to environmental pollution. Nurses can lead initiatives to reduce waste by promoting recycling, implementing sustainable procurement practices, and advocating for the responsible disposal of medical materials. This approach aligns with the nursing commitment to "do no harm" [1]. Nurses have a crucial role in educating patients about the links between environmental factors and health outcomes. By providing information on lifestyle choices, sustainable practices, and the impact of environmental pollutants, nurses empower patients to make choices that positively influence their health and the environment. Sustainable healthcare extends beyond the clinical setting. Nurses can encourage patients to adopt eco-friendly lifestyles, from choosing sustainable diets to reducing single-use plastic consumption. These small changes not only contribute to individual health but also foster a collective commitment to environmental well-being.

Climate change exacerbates existing health inequities, affecting vulnerable populations disproportionately. Nurses, as advocates for health equity, must address the social determinants of health exacerbated by climate change, advocating for policies that prioritize the health of marginalized communities. Nurses can actively participate in climate mitigation efforts. This includes supporting policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable transportation options, and engaging in community-based initiatives

that enhance resilience to climate-related health risks [2]. Nursing education should evolve to integrate environmental health into curricula. This ensures that future nurses are equipped with the knowledge and skills to address the environmental determinants of health. By incorporating sustainability principles into education, nurses become catalysts for change within healthcare systems. Nursing research can play a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the intersection between health and the environment. Research initiatives can explore the health impacts of environmental policies, interventions to promote sustainable practices in healthcare, and innovative approaches to mitigating environmental health disparities.

Nurses possess a unique voice that can influence policy change. By advocating for evidence-based environmental health policies, nurses can contribute to the development of regulations that protect both individual and planetary health. This may include supporting legislation for clean energy, pollution control, and sustainable urban planning. Active participation in environmental health committees within healthcare institutions empowers nurses to influence decision-making processes. By contributing their expertise, nurses can shape institutional policies that prioritize sustainability, setting an example for other healthcare providers. The intersection of nursing and environmental health calls for a paradigm shift in how healthcare is conceptualized and delivered. Nurses, as trusted advocates for patient well-being, are uniquely positioned to lead the charge toward sustainable healthcare practices. This call to action encourages nurses to embrace their role as stewards of both individual health and the health of the planet, fostering a healing environment that extends beyond the clinic to contribute to a sustainable and resilient future [3].

Nurses can influence the adoption of energy-efficient medical equipment within healthcare facilities. Supporting the use of devices that prioritize energy conservation not only reduces the carbon footprint but also contributes to cost savings for healthcare institutions. Sustainable nursing practices extend to supply chain management. Nurses can advocate for green procurement strategies, encouraging the use of eco-friendly products and materials. This approach promotes sustainability throughout the healthcare supply chain. Nurses can champion the transition to reusable and recyclable materials in clinical settings. From patient gowns to medical instruments, the incorporation of sustainable materials reduces the environmental impact of healthcare waste. Embracing circular economy principles in healthcare involves minimizing waste, reusing materials, and recycling products. Nurses can collaborate with waste management teams to implement circular economy initiatives, contributing to a more sustainable and eco-conscious healthcare system. Nurse leaders can play a pivotal role in promoting sustainability by incorporating training programs for nursing staff. These programs can cover topics such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and the broader implications of sustainable healthcare practices. Nurse leaders can advocate for the integration of sustainability into nursing policies at both institutional and organizational levels. This includes the development of guidelines that emphasize the importance of sustainable practices in nursing care [4].

Nurses are powerful advocates within their communities. By engaging in community outreach programs, nurses can educate the public on the interconnectedness of environmental health and well-being. This may involve hosting workshops, participating in local events, and collaborating with community organizations to promote environmental awareness. Nurses can actively support and participate in local environmental initiatives. Whether its tree planting events, clean-up drives, or advocacy campaigns for sustainable

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practices, nurses can leverage their influence to foster a sense of environmental responsibility within their communities.

The use of telehealth not only enhances healthcare accessibility but also aligns with sustainability goals. By reducing the need for travel, telehealth contributes to lower carbon emissions and supports a more environmentally friendly approach to healthcare delivery. Nurses can utilize remote monitoring technologies for chronic disease management. This approach not only enhances patient care but also reduces the environmental impact associated with frequent hospital visits. Remote monitoring aligns with sustainability by minimizing the ecological footprint of healthcare services. Nurse leaders can advocate for the incorporation of healing gardens and green spaces within healthcare facilities. These environments contribute to patient well-being, promote biodiversity, and create therapeutic spaces that align with sustainable healthcare principles. Integrating nature-inspired design elements into healthcare settings has been shown to have positive effects on patient outcomes. Nurses can collaborate with architects and facility planners to incorporate biophilic design principles that enhance both the patient experience and environmental sustainability [5].

Nurses engaged in research can focus on evaluating the environmental impact of various healthcare practices. This includes assessing the carbon footprint of different interventions, technologies, and supply chain decisions to inform more sustainable healthcare practices. Nursing research can explore innovative approaches to green nursing. This may involve investigating the efficacy of eco-friendly materials in wound care, assessing the environmental impact of different medications, or developing sustainable protocols for nursing interventions. The call to action for sustainable nursing practices extends across various dimensions of healthcare, encompassing clinical settings, community engagement, leadership, and research. Nurses, as advocates for health and environmental well-being, have the opportunity to lead transformative changes that promote both individual and planetary health. By integrating sustainability into nursing practices, policies, and education, nurses contribute to a more resilient, eco-conscious healthcare system that prioritizes the well-being of current and future generations.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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