



Primary Health Care

Position statements describe CRNBC's views on issues that affect nursing practice. They can assist registrants to influence change.

ISSUE

Primary health care has been identified as key to the sustainability of the Canadian health system. It has never been fully implemented in British Columbia.

CRNBC POSITION

College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC) endorses the principles of the Canada Health Act – universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration.

CRNBC supports primary health care, with its five principles (accessibility, public participation, health promotion, appropriate technology, and intersectoral cooperation), as the foundation of a sustainable health care system.

Each component of essential health care (health promotion, disease and injury prevention, curative care, rehabilitation, and supportive care including palliative care) should receive emphasis consistent with its potential to contribute to the health of as many people as possible.

Government has a responsibility to ensure that all essential health care services are universally accessible to Canadians regardless of the person's health care setting or ability to pay.

There is an urgent need to implement primary health care. Governments and health authorities have a critical role to play in reorienting the health care system to primary health care.

The community health centre model is the ideal way to make primary health care a reality in British Columbia. Community health centres should be: the focal point for a range of services provided by interdisciplinary teams; a resource for information and referrals; and the hub for community initiatives to promote health.

Nursing practice in all settings must be aligned with primary health care principles. Nurses¹ contributions to primary health care range from providing direct care, to capacity building and partnership activities with groups and communities, to advocacy for healthy public policy at all levels.

CRNBC supports interdisciplinary service delivery in which nurses work as equal partners with other members of the health care team and act as a point-of-entry to health care.

Nursing education must prepare nurses for a health care system that is grounded in primary health care. Nurses' educational

preparation must equip them to improve equity, access to health care and client outcomes.

BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), primary health care is essential health care made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community by means acceptable to them through their full participation and at a cost the community and country can afford.

The five principles of primary health care are:

- **Accessibility:** A continuing and organized supply of essential health services is available to all people with no unreasonable geographic or financial barriers.
- **Public Participation:** Individuals and communities have the right and responsibility to be active partners in making decisions about their own health care and the health of their communities.
- **Health Promotion:** The process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health.
- **Appropriate Technology:** Includes methods of care, service delivery, procedures and equipment that are socially acceptable and affordable.
- **Intersectoral Cooperation:** Commitment from all sectors (government, community and health) is essential for meaningful action on health determinants.

It is important to make a clear distinction between primary health care and primary care. **Primary care** provides the first point of contact with a health care provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up for a specific health concern. **Primary health care** encompasses primary care but is a broader concept incorporating prevention, community development, a wide range of community programs and services, interdisciplinary teams, and intersectoral action on healthy public policy.

The key elements of community health centres are: clear definition of community; partnership between client and provider; comprehensive range of coordinated essential health care; 24-hour access to care; interdisciplinary team practice; payment of providers through means other than fee for service; support for self-care, mutual support and informal caregivers; training and education for all participants and partners; and positive and flexible community governance and management practices.

¹ "Nurses" refers to the following CRNBC registrants: registered nurses, nurse practitioners, licensed graduate nurses, student nurses.

POSITION STATEMENT

Nurses have contributed to advancing primary health care by clarifying the concept and showing how the overall approach is an excellent fit with nursing. Both the International Council of Nurses and the Canadian Nurses Association have described a role for nurses in primary health care. As services are reoriented, nurses play an active part in implementing the primary health care approach by working with their local communities, other disciplines, and health authorities to ensure that the principles are understood and applied.

CRNBC RESOURCES

Print resources to assist you are available from the CRNBC website www.crnbc.ca or Helen Randal Library. E-mail pubs@crnbc.ca or telephone 604.736.7331 (ext. 118) or 1.800.565.6505 (B.C. only).

Advocacy

(position statement - pub. 391)

The New Health Care: A Nursing Perspective (pub. 49)

CRNBC Helen Randal Library Reference Librarian. E-mail reflib@crnbc.ca or telephone 604.736.7331 (ext. 119) or 1.800.565.6505 (B.C. only).

OTHER RESOURCES

Canadian Nurses Association. (2001). *Fact sheet: The primary health care approach*. Ottawa: Author.

Health Canada. (1995). *Building a stronger foundation: A framework for planning and evaluating community-based health services in Canada*. (Online). Available: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/healthcare/pubs/foundation/framework.htm

International Council of Nurses. (2000). *Position statement: Nurses and primary health care*. Geneva: Author.

Leslie, J., & Whyte, N. (2001). *B.C. Network of community health centres: A resources guide*. (Online). Available: www.chcnet.bc.ca

World Health Organization and UNICEF. (1978). Alma-Ata 1978. *Primary health care: Report of the international conference on primary health care*. Geneva: Author. (Online). Available: www.who.ch