

Nursing Student's Role in the Greening of Health Care

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As future nurses, we promote health every day in our clinical settings for our patients, in an attempt to create a well society. Often, we advocate for better health by suggesting that our patients follow the Canada Food Guide, or use their spirometers, or share their goals with us. Unfortunately, the promoting of a “greener” environment, and environmentally friendlier health care practices are often overlooked, because people are unaware of the links between the two. However, if we become aware of how environmental pollution negatively affects one’s health, we realize that it should be one of our first priorities in caring for our patients. For example, the use of pesticides. Research has shown that pesticides have been correlated with a higher prevalence of Parkinson’s, in such places as the South Shore of Montreal (McKinney, 2010).

It is also important to consider the environment when providing healthcare—how can we reduce our environmental impact while performing our health care work? The damaging effects that our society has on the environment is no longer new; it seems that almost no young adult can remember a time when “global warming” and “reusable energy” were not buzz words. Promoting care for the environment is just as important as promoting care for our patients—you cannot have one without the other. As nurses, we can do many things to address this issue.

One thing that I am doing personally is helping to found a committee of environmentally-conscious nurses and nursing students in Quebec. We call ourselves “Régroupement des Infirmiers et infirmières du Québec/Quebec Nurses for the Environment (QNE),” and we would like to help the Quebec Order of Nurses become more aware of the environment and its impact on health and to encourage the Order to take a position on provincial and federal issues that affect the environment, such as the recent Ministers’ meeting in Copenhagen.

The environment is very important to me, and I am dedicated to the Quebec Nurses of the Environment’s mission. The group unifies nurses and devotes its work in ways that protect the

environment, and consequently encourages global health. We focus on researching environmental issues, educating the public, and advocating governmental legislation for the cause. QNE recognizes that the damaging effects that an unhealthy environment has on health is not a new phenomenon, and QNE is standing up and creating concrete solutions to the problem. For example, McGill University uses only natural-based cleaning solutions for basic janitorial work. There is also a group of researchers developing a “lab waste reduction” project (Fortune, 2010). Can we use these ideas in our hospitals and health care centres? Let’s find out!

Although it is unknown to some people, the environment and nursing practice do in fact go together. With efforts from organizations like Quebec Nurse for the environment, Health Care without Harm, and the Luminary project, the environment is coming to the forefront of practice. We may say, “We didn’t start it,” but surely, we can also say, “We can stop it—and hopefully even *reverse* the environmental damage that has been caused.”

References

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endorses this view.

McKinney, A. (2010, January 28). Address. Lecture for Drugs and Disease, PHAR301, McGill

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