

EFFECTIVE HEALTH CARE EQUALS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE (PHC)

- Primary health care is a comprehensive system of essential health care that is focused on preventing illness and promoting health.
- The Canadian Nurses Association endorses the primary health approach as the most effective way of providing health care to a population.
- The five principles of primary health care are:
 - Accessibility;
 - Public participation;
 - Health promotion;
 - Appropriate skills and technology; and
 - Intersectoral cooperation.
- The goal of nursing practice is to improve the health of clients. In working to that goal, nurses must apply the five principles of the primary health care approach. This is true for nurses involved in direct care, education, research, administration or policy roles.

• **Accessibility**

Effective health care is accessible and equitable to all individuals and communities. Whether individuals, families, groups or communities are seeking diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and/or palliative care, as well as support and advice to prevent disease, the PHC approach ensures the right provider is offering the right care at the right time and the right place.

An example:

The North Shore Ambulatory Nursing Clinic in North Vancouver had noted a high number of home visit appointment cancellations by cancer patients. This was attributed to conflicting appointments with other health professionals. A program of centralized nursing clinics to replace home visits was developed. The results of the program include coordination of care for cancer patients, improved access to appropriate services by appropriate health professionals and more efficient use of resources.

• **Public Participation**

Effective health care means individuals, families and communities actively participating in decisions affecting their health.

An example:

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures project, being implemented in eight disadvantaged communities in Ontario, found that the strong involvement of local residents in all aspects of program delivery and implementation are critical to the acceptance and appropriateness of the programs.



- **Health Promotion**

Effective health care encompasses more than physical and mental health - it takes into account social, economic, environmental and spiritual factors. The goal of health promotion is to enable individuals, families and communities to live healthier lives. It involves activities related to health education, advocacy, illness prevention and strong community participation.

An example:

The Montreal Dietary Dispensary (MDD) Program is an award-winning program established to help disadvantaged women by providing nutritional counselling and support to expectant mothers at risk.

A cost/benefit analysis revealed that for every \$1 spent on a MDD client, \$8 was saved in health care costs. It was estimated that the \$6 million required to provide intervention for all of the low-income pregnant women at any one time in the province of Quebec, could be entirely recovered within 12-14 months through reduced health care costs.

- **Appropriate skills and technology**

Effective health care uses appropriate technology based on health needs of communities. It involves consideration of alternatives to high-cost, high-tech services.

An example:

The University of Ottawa's Heart Institute provides cardiac consultations to clients in the North, especially in aboriginal communities, via telehealth and telemedicine.

Patients have continuous and uninterrupted (24/7/365) access to nurses. Based on information about a patient's health information, the nurse directs the patient to adjust his/her diet or medication(s), or the nurse puts the patient in direct contact with an appropriate professional.

- **Intersectoral cooperation**

Effective health care means working with other sectors that influence the health of communities and individuals, e.g., education, social services, environment, etc.

An example:

Dr. Gina Browne, from McMaster University, conducted a groundbreaking study looking at what financial and social implications happen when you provide comprehensive care for single mothers on welfare and their children, instead of leaving them to fend for themselves in a fragmented system. They found that providing comprehensive services to families enabled them to successfully leave income maintenance programs.

November 2002

FS-17

Permission to reproduce is granted. Please acknowledge the Canadian Nurses Association.

Canadian Nurses Association, 50 Driveway, Ottawa ON K2P 1E2
Tel: (613) 237-2133 or 1-800-361-8404 Fax: (613) 237-3520
Web site: www.cna-nurses.ca E-mail: pr@cna-nurses.ca