

Chapter 12

Exploring the Nexus of Environmental Health and Nursing: Overview, Pathologies, and Sustainable Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the complex relationship between nursing practices and environment, aiming to illuminate the interconnectedness and challenges within this dynamic field. Improved practice environments are pivotal in attaining optimal outcomes for nurses. Healthcare can participate positively or negatively on the environmental quality, it can contribute to the cycle of harm through mishandling waste and water pollution, or to preservation of environment. Therefore, incorporating practical measures for environmental protection within hospitals presents a valuable opportunity to elevate the quality of patient care, reducing the occurrence of illness and to enhance the environmental health. Nurses can incorporate environmental

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sustainability and protection considerations into the diagnosis and treatment. They play a crucial role in observing the effects of lifestyles, social vulnerability, pollution and heatwaves. They hold considerable societal esteem for the quality of information they provide, influencing patient behavior towards health and the environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The environment significantly influences public health and overall well-being. Issues like air and soil pollution, climate change, the destruction of healthy ecosystems, and the emergence of new microorganisms such as the SARS-COVID-2 virus all contribute to a decreased quality of life. Environmental damage or contamination can have both immediate and long-term health effects (Luque-Alcaraz et al., 2022).

The healthcare industry is among the most resource-intensive sectors, consuming large quantities of water, food, plastics, and energy (Fields et al., 2021). According to the World Health Organization in 2009, this sector may have one of the largest environmental footprints in terms of energy and materials usage (WHO, 2010). In Morocco, hospitals generate approximately 21,000 tons of waste annually, with hazardous medical waste making up about 28% of this total (Abdallaoui Maan et al., 2023).

To mitigate the environmental impacts and enhance the health and well-being of both current and future generations, it is crucial to involve health professionals, especially nurses, who form the majority of the primary healthcare workforce (Álvarez-Nieto et al., 2022).

Advanced nursing practices are not limited to direct patient care, but also include a crucial role in protecting public health in the face of environmental challenges such as pollution and associated pathologies. Thus, integrating these aspects into nursing education and practice is essential if global health needs are to be met in a holistic and sustainable way. Nurses, as frontline health professionals, are ideally positioned to play a crucial role in promoting sustainable practices and raising awareness of the impacts of the environment on human health. They act as environmental health stewards and hold a key position in reducing the impact of the health sector on ecological degradation (Lopez-Medina et al., 2019).

Healthcare professionals, through their unique influence, can promote evidence-based environmental health policies, supporting laws on clean energy, pollution control, and sustainable urban planning. Their participation in environmental health committees allows them to shape sustainable institutional policies. As trusted patient advocates, they are well-positioned to lead the transition to sustainable healthcare practices, contributing to a resilient and sustainable future (Klein et al., 2020). The

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