



### **D13 Role of the Forensic Clinical Nurse Specialist in Public Health, for Bioterrorism and Disaster Response Training of Nursing Staff**

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The goal of this presentation is to illustrate how the forensic background and experience of the (Forensic Clinical Nurse Specialist) FCNS is ideally suited to this emerging position within public health; To describe public health core competencies for public health workers; and to describe the role of the FCNS in a large, urban health department.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by expanding the role and skill sets of Public Health Nurses, RNs, LVN/LPNs, and auxiliary nursing staff, within the communities already served; enhancing community and Public Health readiness to respond for a variety of emergencies or disasters; and improving capacity for teamwork between Public Health nursing staff and other first responders in a given community, in accordance with federal and CDC standards.

Communities look to local public health departments for guidance and recommendations in a myriad of health-related situations on a daily basis. The potential and actualization of both natural and man-made disasters have prompted public health nursing to expand its role into new borders and frontiers to better serve target communities. The general role of public health in emergencies is an extension of the general mission of public health, i.e., to promote physical and mental health and prevent disease, injury, and disability (*Public Health in America*). This paper will focus on the training of Public Health Nursing and other health promotion or allied nursing staff.

Depending on the type of disaster or emergency, the role of an individual public health agency may be that of a lead position, collaborative, or supportive in nature. Therefore, public health staff must be competent to carry out a diverse range of responsibilities. Public health employees are designated as disaster service workers. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has defined core competencies for public health workers. Increasingly, job descriptions and functional roles define and reference emergency responsibilities and tasks. Examples of core responsibilities include disease surveillance and outbreak investigation and follow-up. These require multidisciplinary, multiagency collaboration on a regular basis; the need becomes more pivotal in biological, environmental, and/or weather emergencies. Man-made and natural disasters, emerging infectious diseases, e.g., SARS, and potential pandemics, e.g., avian flu, predicate a need for all Public Health Nurses to incorporate disaster planning and response into their repertoire of clinical skill sets.

Traditional public health work, such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), other communicable diseases, maternal-child nursing, and high-risk infant follow up, to name but a few, continue to require the knowledge and experience of the Public Health Nurse (PHN). Increasing fiscal limitations and consolidation of programs and resources have presented challenges to both administrators and staff. The events of the last 5 years has brought to the forefront the need for public health nursing staff to incorporate an additional role into their arsenal of skills, that of disaster response. In addition to more typical emergency response, PHNs need to understand biological and chemical agents, basic principles of weapons of mass destruction, and the national incident command system (NIMS). All public health employees need to know chain-of-command, emergency response plans, their functional role in an emergency response, how to utilize communication equipment, and communication channels. Staff need to be able to identify limits and resources, recognize deviations from normal that might indicate an emergent situation, and how to take appropriate action.

Public health nursing professionals need to be able to demonstrate their clinical readiness to respond via regular exercises and drills. They should be able to incorporate epidemiological surveillance, laboratory resources, science-based investigations, and risk-assessment into their preparedness skills. Some of the disease entities that PHNs study for bioterrorism and disaster preparedness include smallpox, anthrax, plague, tularemia, and pandemic flu.

Specific clinical skills can be taught and demonstrated regularly, to ensure competency is maintained. Examples of these skills include the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), the incident command systems (ICS), phlebotomy skills, vaccination techniques (mass vaccination scenarios), nasopharyngeal swab collection, and methods to administer mass prophylaxis of antibiotics. Some counties, like Santa Clara County, California, are collaborating to operationalize the concept of influenza care centers (ICCs), as a modality of care in the event of pandemic flu. Likewise, points-of-distribution (PODs) are being planned for mass antibiotic distribution to a large population within a short interval of time, e.g., in a weaponized anthrax event. Public Health Nursing would have a pivotal role in all these



## General Section – 2007

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non-traditional venues.

The forensic background of the FCNS is one that includes multidisciplinary teamwork and collaboration on a regular basis, with members of law enforcement, the criminal justice system, emergency departments, and other first responders. Forensic nurses are experts in the principles and practice of chain-of-custody. They are accustomed to troubleshooting gaps in knowledge and experience and at creative problem solving to achieve pragmatic solutions that can be tailored for an individual “fit.” Likewise, the forensic experience crosses all geographical boundaries, i.e., urban, rural, state, regional, national, and global.

Forensic investigations parallel the process of disease surveillance. Most forensic nurses are versed at working in highly stressful clinical situations; thus they understand the implications of catastrophic events on both staff and vulnerable populations. The forensic clinical nurse specialist should be able to draw on forensic experiences to plan and implement training modules, exercises and drills, and to develop *just-in-time training* for exigent situations. Moreover, as a nurse, the FCNS can identify with, and better employ, creative solutions to the training of public health nursing personnel.

**Disaster Nursing, Forensic Nurse, Public Health Nursing**