



## BRIDGING THE GAP: NURSE-LED INITIATIVES FOR MITIGATING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH DISPARITIES

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### Abstract

Nurses have the potential to play a crucial role in advancing health care fairness in the next ten years by assuming more responsibilities, working in novel environments with creative approaches, and collaborating with communities and other sectors. However, the ability of nurses to assist individuals and communities in leading healthier lifestyles can only be achieved if the obstacles preventing them from using their education and training to the fullest degree are eliminated. In order to achieve this objective, it will be imperative to modify laws pertaining to the range of activities that healthcare professionals are authorized to do, as well as policies related to public health and the healthcare system. Additionally, state laws concerning the use of standing orders and the regulations governing payment for Medicare and other payers will need to be revised. The next generation of nurses will practice and lead in an environment that will undergo significant transformations due to major upheavals in both society and health care. In order to attain complete health care equality, nursing schools must prioritize the development of nurses who possess the ability to address the socioeconomic determinants of health and provide treatment that is tailored to individuals' circumstances, independent of their practice environment.

**Keywords:** Social determinates, nurse, healthcare system, review.

### 1. Introduction

Health care equality aims to provide everyone access to top-notch health care services. According to by Castrucci and Auerbach (2019), health care is considered a factor that affects health outcomes, but inequalities in accessing and receiving quality health care can worsen disparities caused by other factors that influence health outcomes. As per Healthy People 2020, access to excellent health care refers to the capacity to enter the health care system by means of health insurance, availability in a certain geographic area, and the ability to reach a health care practitioner. Health care quality is described as the extent to which health care services improve



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the chances of achieving desired outcomes for people and groups, while also aligning with current professional knowledge. Nurses ensure the delivery of top-notch care by delivering care that is secure, efficient, focused on the individual, prompt, effective, and fair.

As said, social determinants of health (SDOH) models often position the health care system as a reactive force, addressing sickness rather than addressing the root causes of health outcomes (Castrucci and Auerbach, 2019). Hence, healthcare alone fails to tackle the primary factors or underlying causes of illness that impact health equity. These upstream social factors include economic and housing instability, discrimination, racism, educational disparities, and insufficient nutrition. They can influence an individual's health even before the healthcare system becomes involved (Castrucci and Auerbach, 2019). Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive discussion of health equity. According to some estimations, only a tiny fraction of health outcomes can be attributed to health care, whereas ensuring fairness in health care is a significant aspect in achieving health equality (Hood et al., 2016; Remington et al., 2015).

The next generation of nurses will practice and lead in an environment that is undergoing significant changes both in society as a whole and in the field of healthcare. These developments include the transformation of demography, which includes a decrease in physical and mental health, a greater focus on racism and equality concerns, the creation and acceptance of new technology, and changes in the way healthcare is provided. The extensive mobilization for racial justice, along with the evident racial disparities in the effects of COVID-19, has strengthened the nursing profession's ethical need to promote racial justice and address the inequalities ingrained in the existing healthcare system. Provision 9 of the Code of Ethics of the American Nurses Association (ANA, 2015) demonstrates a strong dedication to social justice. This commitment has gained importance due to the growing need for social justice in communities and society as a whole.

To achieve improvements in health outcomes, it is necessary to take action at all levels: upstream, midstream, and downstream. Nurses play a significant role at each level in addressing disparities in clinical outcomes and enhancing equality in healthcare. Nurses may enhance their dedication to diversity, fairness, and inclusion by spearheading extensive initiatives to demolish structural factors that contribute to inequality and establish new standards and skills within the healthcare sector. During the process, nurses will be required to address intricate ethical dilemmas that will emerge as the healthcare system adapts to the swiftly evolving environment (Beard and Julion, 2016; Koschmann et al., 2020; Villarruel and Broome, 2020). In order to guarantee that nursing actively participates in these significant changes in healthcare and society, it will be crucial to invest in the welfare of nurses.

## **2. The roles of nurses in increasing access to high-quality healthcare**

Race and ethnicity, wealth, gender, and geographic location significantly influence an individual's access to healthcare that is of high quality, fair, and inexpensive. Efforts to guarantee equal access to care include the participation of specialists from several fields, both inside and

outside of health care settings. However, the involvement of nurses in these endeavors is crucial, as they have direct contact with individuals and families, providing and organizing personalized care for preventive, acute, and chronic health issues within healthcare facilities. They also collaborate with social services to address the social needs of individuals and contribute to the overall health of the population and community through their roles in public health and community-based settings.

The significant increase in the elderly population worldwide is expected to result in a higher demand for services and programs to address their health and social care requirements. This includes the need for care related to chronic conditions, which make up about 75 percent of all primary care visits. The increasing elderly population will need a transformation in the kind of care required by the patient group. Elderly individuals often need more costly healthcare and demand escalating assistance in controlling many ailments while maintaining physical strength and resilience as they get older (Pohl et al., 2018).

The significance of developing, evaluating, and implementing chronic care models is emphasized by these facts. These models rely on teams to effectively manage chronic diseases, with registered nurses (RNs) serving as crucial chronic disease care managers (Bodenheimer and Mason, 2016). The analysis of outstanding primary care practices conducted by Bodenheimer et al. (2015) and Smolowitz et al. (2015) identifies the essential areas of registered nurse (RN) practice in primary care. These areas include preventive care, treatment of chronic illnesses, operational aspects of the practice, care coordination, and transitional care.

Following the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, significant modifications have taken place in the structure and provision of primary healthcare. These changes have focused on increasing the engagement of healthcare teams in patient care and expanding the responsibilities of each team member, including Registered Nurses (Flinter et al., 2017). The inclusion of Registered Nurses (RNs) in healthcare teams has many benefits. It may enhance the availability of treatment, enhance the quality and coordination of care for chronic illnesses, and alleviate burnout among primary care practitioners by extending the capacity of primary care. These findings are supported by studies conducted by Fraher et al. (2015), Ghorob and Bodenheimer (2012), and Lamb et al. (2015).

### **3. Nursing in an educational setting**

School nurses serve as primary health care professionals, acting as a link between the health care and education systems. School nurses are employed by school districts, health agencies, or hospitals to provide medical and psychological care to kids in educational settings. As guardians of public health, they actively involve school communities, parents, and health care professionals in order to enhance well-being and enhance health results for children. School nurses play a crucial role in improving students' access to high-quality healthcare, particularly given the growing population of pupils with intricate health and social requirements. Providing pupils with

access to school nurses promotes fairness in healthcare by ensuring equal opportunities for everyone.

School nurses provide medical care and support to students with chronic health conditions and disabilities. They also address injuries and urgent care needs, offer preventive and screening services, provide health education and immunizations, and offer psychosocial support. Additionally, they conduct behavioral assessments and work together with healthcare providers, school staff, and the community to ensure comprehensive care for each child (Holmes et al., 2016; HRSA, 2017; Lineberry and Ickes, 2015; Maughan, 2018). School health initiatives have the potential to narrow the performance gap by promoting and maintaining the well-being of pupils (Basch, 2011; Maughan, 2018).

Addressing the mental health needs of children may pose significant difficulties. Approximately 25% of school-age children and adolescents have mental health challenges, including anxiety and sadness, according to researchers' estimates. According to Foster et al. (2005), over 30 percent of student health visits to the school nurse are related to mental health issues, which are often concealed by complaints of headaches and stomachaches. School nurses possess expertise in identifying kids who may be vulnerable to various issues and may provide support to students in managing these problems. Nevertheless, a significant majority of young individuals, over 80 percent, who need mental health services will not get them (Kataoka et al., 2005).

Educational institutions are often ill-prepared to address the emotional requirements of pupils, and parents often lack the knowledge or means to seek assistance for their children. In addition, a recent research discovered inequalities in the availability of mental health care for students based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Lipson et al., 2018). Furthermore, structural racism serves as the foundation for several variables that increase the risk of mental illness. The COVID-19 epidemic has exposed and worsened disparities among children from varying poverty levels and racial/ethnic backgrounds. The closure of schools and the implementation of social isolation measures have had an impact on all kids, with a particular emphasis on those who are living in poverty. The absence of mental health services provided by schools, in addition to the negative impact on student learning, has led to the development of a mental health crisis (Leeb et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020).

Schools are now seen not just as fundamental educational institutions but also as community-based resources that play a crucial role in constructing thriving and robust communities. Consequently, schools and their nurses are being included in efforts to enhance access to healthcare, functioning as centers for promoting health and delivering care to the whole community (Maughan, 2018). 39.3 percent of schools had a part-time nurse, whereas 25.2 percent of schools did not have a nurse at all (Willgerodt, 2018). The presence and number of school nurses vary significantly depending on the geographical location (Willgerodt, 2018).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Nurses strive to tackle the underlying factors contributing to ill health, whether they are working in an elementary school, a hospital, or a community health clinic. Nurses, being the biggest and most reliable members of the healthcare sector, operate in many situations. They possess the capacity to effectively oversee and cooperate with teams, while also establishing connections between clinical treatment, public health, and social services. Additionally, they are skilled at fostering trust among communities. Nevertheless, nurses are constrained in their ability to fully use their education and training due to state and federal regulations that restrict their scope of practice. The COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the need for the United States to improve the connection between health, healthcare, and social and economic requirements. Nurses are in a favorable position to establish this connection.

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