

## Discipline Specific Competencies for Public Health Nursing

### A. INTRODUCTION

Public health nursing is defined as “the practice of promoting and protecting the health of populations using knowledge from nursing, social, and public health sciences” (American Public Health Association, Public Health Nursing Section, p.1, 1996). In addition to the generic competencies required for registered nurses, discipline specific competencies for public health nurses (PHNs) are those vital for fulfilling the professional roles and standards required of this nursing specialty. They are defined here as the essential knowledge, skills, judgment, attitudes, values and beliefs for safe and ethical practice in this specialty.

### B. DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC CORE COMPETENCIES

#### ***Competency 1. Knowledge in Public Health and Nursing Sciences***

PHNs should have the ability to appraise and apply the current knowledge in public health and nursing sciences embracing the following areas:

##### 1.1 History and knowledge of public health, including:

- the development of public health in local and global context;
- the key local, national and international public health organizations, agreements/guiding principles and standards; and
- the major public health issues including the contemporary local, regional and global health situations.

##### 1.2 Contemporary nursing theories/constructs relating to public health nursing

##### 1.3 Behavioural and social sciences

##### 1.4 Environmental health sciences

##### 1.5 Epidemiology and biostatistics

##### 1.6 Community assessment theories

##### 1.7 Health education and health promotion theories and strategies

##### 1.8 Disease prevention and management

##### 1.9 Public health administration and management

##### 1.10 Program planning and evaluation by using evidence and research to inform health policies, programs and practice

#### ***Competency 2. Analytical and Assessment Skills***

PHNs collect, assess, analyze and apply information from data, facts, concepts and theories for making decisions, conducting investigations and making recommendations at work.

They should be able to:

2.1 assess the health status of populations and related determinants of health and illness by:

- identifying the sources of public health data and information;
- using information technology to collect, store and retrieve data;
- verifying the integrity and comparability of the data collected;
- applying community assessment theories; and
- summarizing the characteristics of a population in terms of social equity, health determinants, social determinants and environmental influences.

2.2 Detect the presence of a health issue by assessing the social, cultural, political, environmental and economic determinants of health by:

- Identifying the patterns and trends revealed in epidemiological data and statistics of service delivery;
- collecting accurate information from relevant and appropriate sources on public health issues;
- determining the implications, gaps and limitations of the information; and
- conducting comprehensive quantitative and qualitative community assessments to determine the impact of the identified issue.

2.3 Analyze the impact of the specific issue on health in the following contexts:

- political climate and will;
- social values and culture;
- social and systemic structures; and
- health status and functional competence of the affected individuals, families, communities within the context of their environmental and social supports.

2.4 Determine the meaning of the issue in the current political, scientific, socio-cultural and economic contexts without undermining ethical principles. Identify:

- the population's attitudes, beliefs and values about health and their effect on social relationships and the anticipated interventions;
- the available support to individuals, families and communities in identifying risks to health and making informed choices; and
- opportunities for the vulnerable to voice out.

2.5 Recommend specific actions based on the analysis of available information to identify:

- short and long term goals;
- outcome indicators;
- research questions; and

- a range of appropriate interventions using a multi-strategy and multi-target approach: including health promotion, health protection, disease and injury prevention as well as clinical care.

2.6 Seek opportunities to promote social justice by involving people in the community to identify and reinforce daily life practices, cultural and political activities that are conducive to health.

### **Competency 3. Policy Development/Program Planning, Implementation and Evaluation Skills**

These core competencies are required for nurses to plan, implement and evaluate policies and programs in public health.

#### 3.1 Policy Development

PHNs should be able to:

- formulate policy options and explain each in relation to the determinants of health;
- recommend policy options which are appropriate to address a specific public health issue;
- develop a plan of implementation; and
- advocate for public policy and services that promote/protect health and reduce inequities in health through legislation, policy making and community capacity building.

#### 3.2 Program Planning

PHNs should be able to:

- formulate options and explain the implications of each, especially on their effects on the determinants of health;
- recommend on program options to address a specific public health issue;
- develop a plan to implement a course of action to address the health needs in collaboration with individuals, families and communities; and
- contribute to the preparation of proposals for funding.

#### 3.3 Implementation and Intervention

PHNs should be able to:

- address specific public health issues by taking coordinated actions and comprehensive public health strategies to address the needs and build the capacity of the individual, families, groups and communities;
- facilitate planned change by applying population-based health promotion, primary health care principles and appropriate change theory;
- integrate relevant research and implement evidence-informed practice;

- participate in collaborative, interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships to enhance the health of individuals, families, communities and populations;
- facilitate access to services in the health sector and other sectors;
- set priorities and maximize outcomes based on available resources;
- maximize the capacity of the individual, families, groups or communities to take responsibility for and to manage their health needs according to resources available and personal skills;
- adapt practice in response to the changing health needs of the individual, families, groups and communities and in response to the unique characteristics of the setting; and
- take action to protect the individual, families, groups and communities from unsafe or unethical circumstances.

### 3.4 Evaluation

PHNs should be able to:

- measure the effect of an action, policy or program on target client/population systematically and continuously;
- evaluate programs in relation to determinants of health and health outcomes;
- involve the clients/communities and stakeholders concerned in the evaluation;
- translate reported evaluation information into a program improvement plan;
- formulate and implement strategies for continuous quality improvement.

### **Competency 4. Partnerships and Collaboration Skills**

PHNs should have the abilities in influencing and working with others with the common goal of improving health and well-being of the public and reducing inequities in access to health services.

PHNs should be able to:

- 4.1 identify and establish linkage with key stakeholders;
- 4.2 identify and negotiate for the use of community assets and resources;
- 4.3 use group dynamic strategies to build partnerships and support group development;
- 4.4 collaborate with community partners to promote health as well as to address public health issues and service gaps with a goal to achieve appropriate resource allocation and equitable access to resources; and
- 4.5 coordinate with community partners and stakeholders to facilitate the change process for improving health outcomes.

### **Competency 5. Diversity and Cultural Competency Skills**

PHNs should possess competencies to interact effectively with diverse individuals and communities, to recognize the root causes of disparities and to recommend measures to eliminate

them. PHNs should be able to:

- 5.1 recognize how the determinants of health influence the health and well-being of specific population groups;
- 5.2 address population diversity when planning, implementing and evaluating public health programs and policies,; and
- 5.3 apply culturally-relevant and appropriate approaches with consideration to the cultural, socioeconomic, racial, ethnic and educational backgrounds, ages, genders, health status, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical capabilities of the target clients/communities.

### **Competency 6. Communication Skills**

PHNs require the skills to interchange ideas, opinions and information with others. A public health nurse should be able to:

- 6.1 use multi-sensory forms of communication to address unique communication styles of the target audiences for effective communication;
- 6.2 use culturally relevant communication when building relationships and mobilizing clients and communities by using appropriate media, community resources and social marketing techniques;
- 6.3 provide appropriate information to different audiences, such as professional, non-professional audiences, community audiences or the mass media; and
- 6.4 solicit community-based input from individuals and organizations.

### **Competency 7. Leadership Skills**

Leadership competencies are required for enhancing the quality of the working environment and enabling application of shared visions, missions and values in organizations and communities.

PHNs should be able to:

- 7.1 use public health and nursing ethics to manage self, others, information and resources and to practice in accordance with all relevant legislation, regulating body standards and codes;
- 7.2 influence others to realize the mission and vision of the public health organization where they work;
- 7.3 contribute to building key values and a shared vision in public health services and policies by actively working in partnership with community partners and health professionals;
- 7.4 participate actively in mentoring and peer review activities at work;
- 7.5 contribute to the modification of organizational practices in response to the changes in the public health system, and in the larger social, political and economic environment; and
- 7.6 contribute to the advancement of professional learning and practice standards by sharing knowledge and experience, participating in professional development activities, research and

quality assurance initiatives.

### **Competency 8. Emergency Preparedness and Response Competency Skills**

Although PHNs do not practice these skills as part of their routine daily scope of practice, they should familiarize themselves with the necessary skills to respond when circumstances of any given disaster or emergency unfold.

PHNs should be able to:

- 8.1 fulfill the public health role and expectations of the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority in response to a range of likely emergencies;
- 8.2 participate in implementing the pro-active emergency preparedness plans issued by the Food and Health Bureau;
- 8.3 take up probable functional roles and responsibilities of PHNs in anticipated emergency events through continuing education. Key examples are:
  - handling enquires in hotline services;
  - caring for contacts in isolation camps;
  - caring for the sick in designated clinics;
  - implementing mass vaccination campaigns;
  - conducting outbreak investigations; and
  - participating in the mass dispensing of pre-exposure or prophylactic chemoprophylaxis to public health workers or contacts in outbreak control initiatives;
- 8.4 demonstrate the correct use of equipment. Key examples are:
  - the use of standard personal protective equipment (PPE); and
  - the choice of PPE appropriate for the emergency/crisis situation;
- 8.5 identify key system resources for consultation when encountering matters exceeding the limits of knowledge, skills and authority for PHNs at times of public health emergencies/crisis. PHNs should:
  - be flexible about the types of duties assigned without going beyond their knowledge, skills and authority; enhance ability to care for the affected population through just-in-time training if available; and
  - follow the chain of command in emergency responses and have a contact list of the appropriate personnel providing support for various concerns;
- 8.6 apply problem-solving skills to meet challenges within PHNs' functional responsibilities. PHNs should be able to:
  - identify deviation from the norms using assessment skills and launch investigations if indicated; and
  - evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- 8.7 maintain up-to-date knowledge in areas to emergency response through relevant continuing

education, for example, maintaining valid licensure in basic life support.

**Competency 9. Professional Responsibility and Accountability**

PHNs need to recognize their professional responsibilities and accountabilities to ensure the delivery of safe, compassionate and ethical care. They should be able to:

- 9.1 apply the principles of public health while adhering to the nursing ethics laid down by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong in the Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Hong Kong;
- 9.2 assess and improve practice by continually identifying needs/issues and finding solutions;
- 9.3 consult as needed to determine the best course of action in response to ethical dilemmas, safety issues, risks to human rights, new situations and new knowledge;
- 9.4 advocate for effective, efficient and responsible use of resources; and
- 9.5 act upon legal and professional obligations in accordance with relevant legislation.

**Prepared by:**

The Examination Subcommittee

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