Education on Emergency Preparedness for Public Health Nurses in Florida

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The Florida Department of Health's Office of Public Health Nursing (OPHN) has developed awareness and operational-level training to prepare public health nurses (PHN) to respond to all types of hazards/emergencies. The awareness level focuses on general understanding of preparedness concepts pertinent to job functions. The operational level focuses on the application of preparedness concepts pertinent to job functions. Both courses are based on the core competencies developed by Columbia University in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The awareness-level course is web-based and can be taken online. Lessons learned during the 2004 hurricane season have been incorporated into the curriculum. Brief tests presented at the conclusion of each section of the course are used to assess student outcome. Continuing education credit is awarded.

A team of trainers teaches the operational-level course. Each student completes a learning needs assessment before class attendance. Information from these assessments allows for personalization of teaching methods. Didactic sessions provide information on natural, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive hazards and the public health nurse's role and response to such hazards/emergencies. Concepts such as incident command, triage, communication, and surveillance are included. Whenever possible, concepts are illustrated using "disasters" occurring in the world at the time of the class. Students who recently have been involved in an emergency response are encouraged to contribute information from their experience. Skill drills (table-top exercises) on selected concepts are interspersed throughout the day to encourage the application of these concepts.

Because Florida is a large state with many public health nurses, a team of trainers is being recruited to provide the operational-level course to all public health nurses. Preparation to be a trainer includes attendance at the course, as well as a "train the trainer" course, which will include topics on adult education. The trainers and course presentation will be evaluated through course evaluation documents and periodic audits of actual classes.

Keywords: curricula; education; emergency preparedness; nurses; training; United States

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