PARISH NURSING / FAITH COMMUNITY NURSING

Have you ever wished there was a way you could more effectively integrate your spirituality / faith beliefs and your nursing practice?

In the late 1970s / early 1980s the Rev. Dr. Granger Westberg a Lutheran Minister / Hospital Chaplain (author of the best selling book Good Grief) developed the modern day concept of Parish Nursing. This relatively “new” concept of health ministry builds upon the centuries old traditions of religious orders that cared for the sick and needy. This was exemplified in the past in this country by the many hospices, hospitals and schools of nursing that were developed by various Judeo-Christian religious institutions. In recent years, the concept of Parish Nursing/ Faith Community Nursing has swept the nation. In our neighboring state of Montana close to 350 Parish Nurses have been trained in the past ten years.

Parish Nursing, also known as Faith Community Nursing, is a specialized practice of professional nursing that focuses on the intentional care of the spirit as part of the process of promoting wholistic health and preventing or minimizing illness. This practice is guided by the following general principles:

- Effective healthcare requires more than medical treatment of disease or illness.
- Promotion of health and healing are part of the mission and service of a faith community to its members.
- Wellness and wholeness can only fully be achieved when we acknowledge the close connection between body, mind and spirit.

In 1998 the American Nurses Association, in collaboration with the Health Ministries Association (HMA) the professional membership organization for nurses in this specialty, developed the Scope and Standards of Parish Nursing Practice. In 2005, this document was transformed into Faith Community Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice in order to embrace a non-denominational, ecumenical perspective. This document points out that the Faith Community Nurse (FCN) bridges two disciplines and thus must be prepared in and responsible to both. “Appropriate and effective practice as an FCN requires the ability to integrate current nursing, behavioral, environmental and spiritual knowledge with the unique spiritual beliefs and practices of the faith community into a program of wholistic nursing care. This is necessary no matter the level of education the nurse has achieved.” (pg. 4).

FCNs focus on helping the patient (which can be an individual, family or the entire congregation) to achieve health, healing, and wholeness by implementing health promotion and disease prevention practices. They must be caring, spiritually mature people who reach out to comfort, console, strengthen, teach and encourage the faith community. They must have: good communication skills; the ability to work with others within the congregation and the larger community; a demonstrated relationship with a faith community; and the time and desire to implement a health ministry program within their faith community. Their practice focuses on these traditional FCN roles:

- Integrator of Faith and Health
- Health Educator
- Personal Health Counselor
- Referral Agent
FCNs must hold an active license as an RN and should have completed a recognized PN/FCN basic preparation course. FCNs may be paid or volunteer and should work in cooperation with the priest/minister as part of the faith community staff/pastoral care team. Other health professionals (e.g. LPNs, retired RNs, social workers, health educators, physical therapists, physicians, etc.) can be recruited to partner with the FCN as a Health Ministry Team / Health Cabinet thus developing a model to utilize the expertise of many valued health professionals within the faith community.

In May 2007, the Wyoming Health Council, in cooperation with the Parish Nurse Center, Carroll College, Helena, MT conducted a training based on the widely utilized curricula developed by the International Parish Nurse Resource Center, St. Louis, MO. Twelve nurses participated in this event and seven other nurses previously trained through other programs have joined our new Wyoming FCN Network. A 2008 FCN Basic Preparation Course will be held June 15-19 in Cheyenne, WY. This 35 hour/CEU course will include the following topics:

- Health, Healing and Wholeness in the Faith Community
- History and Philosophy of Parish Nursing / Health Ministry
- Ethics in Parish Nursing
- Legal Issues and Accountability
- Assessment: Individual, Family, Faith Community
- Getting Started
- Six Traditional Functions of the Parish Nurse
- Self-care for Parish Nurses
- Functioning within a Ministerial Team
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
- Grief and Loss
- Family Violence
- Documentation
- Prayer and the Worship Leader

For more information about Faith Community Nursing, the Wyoming FCN network, or the Wyoming Basic Preparation Course contact Carol Peterson, MS, RN at the Wyoming Health Council 307-632-3640 or carol@wyhc.org.

To learn more about Faith Community Nursing check out the Health Ministry Association (www.hmassoc.org) and the International Parish Nurse Resource Center (www.parishnurses.org).