What Is Parish Nursing?

An Introduction to Faith Community Nursing for Clergy

William Kasper
Sacred Heart University
NU 387
What Is Faith Community Nursing?

- Faith community (parish) nursing is a specialty within the field of nursing that focuses on the spiritual aspect of care, in conjunction with other health care needs.

- It is a health ministry that serves a religious congregation and beyond, with a focus on the individual parishioner and the entire faith community.

- The American Nurses Association (ANA) defines faith community nursing as a specialized area of nursing that provides wholistic care, with an emphasis on spiritual care, as well as preventative care and healing (Faith Community Nursing, 2012).
Faith community nursing is a valuable resource for the underserved populations who do not have access to other forms of health care, and can provide such groups with lower-cost care (Stanhope, 2016).

In 2005, the ANA revised the *Scope and Standards of Practice* for the specialty. It was at that time that the title, per the ANA, was adapted from parish nurse to faith community nurse, in order to be more welcoming to nurses and congregations of non-Christian faiths, and to encourage their involvement (Stanhope, 2016).

Faith community nursing serves people at all stages of life, male and female, from conception to natural death.

“Faith community nursing is a ‘womb-to-tomb’ ministry” (Deacon James Greer, personal communication, June 16, 2017)
Who Is The Faith Community Nurse?

- The faith community nurse is a registered nurse who has a robust personal religious faith, and a vocation to serve members of a faith community (Stanhope, 2016).

- The faith community nurse has nursing experience prior to working with a congregation, and has attended a certification program for faith community nursing.

- This individual is the leader of the health ministry for the faith community, and works in conjunction with clergy and other faith community staff, to establish a faith community nursing ministry.
What Does The Faith Community Nurse Do?

- Through a combination of nursing skills and faith devotion, a parish nurse cares for faith community members by endorsing health, healing and wholeness.

- The primary purpose of faith community nursing is to provide wholistic care to parishioners.

- Parish, or faith community, nurses work at faith communities of every denomination (churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc.).

- These nurses care for community members of all ethnicities, backgrounds, and educational levels.

- The faith community nurse establishes a health ministry program and arranges activities to promote the health and wellbeing of the faith community’s members.
What Does The Faith Community Nurse Do?

- Home visitation of elderly or infirm faith community members
- Arrange for meals for families in the midst of crisis
- Initiate grief support groups
- Organize healing services for the ill
- Provide health education to members of the faith community
- Assist pregnant mothers who lack resources
- Aid new mothers by providing education in care of the infant
- Establish support groups for those with addiction and for their loved ones
- Coordinate health/active living programs, such as exercise groups

(Trident Health System, n.d.,)
What Does The Faith Community Nurse Do?

- Provide preventative screening services, such as blood pressure clinics
- Advocacy for parishioners in need of care or services
- Wellbeing telephone calls
- Coordination of vaccination clinics
- Assist the elderly and disable with setting up resources and services
- Provide all nursing care with an interwoven spiritual approach
The History of Parish Nursing

- According to Packett (2017), the specialty of parish nursing was begun by Dr. Granger Westberg in 1984.
  - Dr. Westberg was the Director of Chaplainscy at Lutheran General Hospital, in Park Ridge IL
  - Westberg’s desire was to develop a relationship between health care institutions and religious congregations.
  - “He believed that if nurses were available to congregants, they would be able to attend to and care for the early issues of disease and disability and foster a health promotion/disease prevention approach” (Packett, 2017, para. 2)

- The International Parish Nurse Resource Center assumed control of parish nursing and its associated education.

- “In 1989 the Health Ministries Association was formed to provide a membership organization for nurses, clergy and others to join together in a common dialogue for the advancement of the work of Health Ministries and Parish Nursing” (Packett, 2017, para. 8).
Faith Community Nurse Education

- Parish Nurse Resource Center was originally the headquarters for the education of faith community nurses.

- The International Parish Nurse Resource Center assumed responsibility for education until it became the Westberg Institute in 2016.

- Foundations of Faith Community Nursing (n.d.) states that requirements to participate in classes to become a parish or faith community nurse include:
  
  - Licensing as a registered nurse
  - Bachelor of Science in Nursing strongly preferred
  - A minimum of three years clinical nursing experience
  - Five years of medical-surgical nursing experience strongly preferred
  - Strong physical assessment skills
  - Community assessment skills

(Nursing Symbols Clip Art, n.d.)
Faith Community Nurse Education
Specialized Knowledge

- For a nurse to begin ministry in parish/faith community nursing, she must first:
  - Complete a parish/faith community nursing foundations or basic preparation course.
    - Such a program should be based on the Westberg Institute’s core curriculum (Foundations of Faith Community Nursing, n.d.)
  - Theological education for parish/faith community nurses is strongly recommended by the Westberg Institute, in order to improve competency in performing spiritual assessments on parishioners under their care.
Philosophy of Faith Community Nursing

• The parish nurse role reclaims the historic roots of health and healing found in many religious traditions

• The parish nurse lives out the early work of monks, nuns, deacons, church nurses, traditional healers, and the nursing profession itself

• The parish nurse is committed to spiritual formation valuing all persons to be sacred and treated with respect and dignity

• The parish nurse advocates with compassion, mercy, and justice

• The parish nurse supports the active pursuit of personal and community health

• The parish nurse defines health to be a dynamic process which embodies the spiritual, psychological, physical and social variables of well-being

• The parish nurse practices within a faith community ministry to transform and be a source of health and healing

(Garrett, n.d., para. 1)
“Parish nursing is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the historic practice of professional nursing, and is consistent with the basic assumptions of many faiths that we care for self and others as an expression of God's love” (National Caregivers Library, 2017, para. 4).

- Faith community nursing, also known as parish nursing, is focused on healing as part of the mission of the Church.
- Faith community nursing is focused on wholistic care, and the prevention of and screening for illness, and puts a strong emphasis on health promotion.
Seven Functions of the Professional Nurse

- Faith community nursing practice was formerly based on the following seven functions of the professional nurse. It was discovered that the seven items overlapped, and they were subsequently condensed into four areas which incorporated these functions:

1. Integrator of faith and health
2. Personal health counselor
3. Health educator
4. Referral agent
5. Health advocate
6. Coordinator of volunteers
7. Developer of support groups
Four Areas of Faith Community Nursing Practice

- Spirituality
- Professionalism
- Wholistic Health
- Community

(pinterest.com, n.d.)
Four Areas of Faith Community Nursing Practice

1. Spirituality

- Spirituality encompasses all areas of faith community nursing
- It is what sets faith community nursing aside from other nursing specialties
- Faith community nurses place a strong emphasis on spirituality in the delivery of their care
- Members of the faith community who are in need of assistance undergo a “spiritual assessment” by the nurse, which includes the following criteria, using the acronym S.P.I.R.I.T (Hickman, 2011):
  - Spiritual belief system
  - Personal spirituality
  - Integration with a spiritual community
  - Ritualized practices and restrictions
  - Implications for care
  - Terminal events planning
- By completing a spiritual assessment, faith community nurses can assist clergy in understanding the spiritual needs of their congregation.
Four Areas of Faith Community Nursing Practice

2. Professionalism

- The faith community nurse must be accountable to those under his or her care
- There must be clear communication and collaboration between the faith community nurse and the clergy
- Faith community nurses should be evaluated at least annually to ensure expectations of the role are being met
- The faith community member’s expectations should be met by the nurse, in regards to privacy and confidentiality
- The faith community nurse should document appropriately any encounters with members of the faith community

Nurses working in the faith community setting are at lower risk of lawsuit, yet due to their autonomous practice they remain at risk. It is essential that faith community nurses:

- Maintain a current nursing license
- Obey the laws of the corresponding state’s nurse practice act
- Follow the ANA’s scope and standards of practice

(Stanhope, 2016)
3. Wholistic Health

- Addresses body, mind, and spirit
- The goal of wholistic care is to achieve optimal health
- Wholistic health seeks to establish a balance between the patient’s physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects
- Accentuates the wholeness for individuals from conception to death.
- The faith community nurse must create a healing environment to promote wholistic health
- Potential interventions to encourage wholistic health include:
  - Prayer
  - Meditation
  - Counseling
  - Guided imagery (Stanhope, 2016)
Four Areas of Faith Community Nursing Practice

4. Community

- The faith community nurse must explore the community to determine demographics and identify its needs.

- The nurse should conduct a survey of faith community members to assist in identifying needs.

- There are limited community resources within the faith community, thus the nurse must be skilled in locating appropriate resources for its members.

- The faith community nurse must function as an advocate. This is done by assisting community members to gain access to appropriate resources for health care, housing, food, etc.

(Stanhope, 2016)
Faith Community Nurse Networking

- Faith community nurses have regular opportunities to network with their peers, share ideas, and make suggestions.

- Nurses attending faith community nursing courses are able to develop relationships with their peers, and utilize these relationships to improve as they grow in their practice.

- Faith community nursing workshops are offered regularly throughout the country, allowing nurses to come into contact with other faith community nurses.

- Faith community nursing newsletters aid in sharing new ideas and interventions to implement in the faith community.

- Social media is also very beneficial to the networking of faith community nurses.
Summary

- Faith community nursing is unique in its approach, in that it incorporates into nursing care the spiritual aspect of the patient.

- It is a truly wholistic approach to providing nursing care, as it addresses body, mind, and spirit.

- Faith community nursing is not a “hands-on” specialty, but rather, focuses on health promotion, healing, and wellbeing.

- The faith community nurse has many roles in assisting the community’s members, including care provider, educator, and advocate.

- In addition to aiding the members of the faith community, the nurse functions as an important member of the staff, and provides insight to clergy that may otherwise be overlooked.

- All involved in the faith community can benefit from the presence and intervention of the faith community nurse. The work of the nurse is beyond that of medical care—it is a work of the heart.

Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.

-Matthew 25:40 DRB
References

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