



## State Report

**State:** Connecticut

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### Connecticut 2009 State Report for Public Health Nurses

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) Virtual Office of Public Health Nurses' (VOPHN) vision is to promote the health of populations in Connecticut by supporting excellence in public health nursing practice. To achieve our vision through a "virtual" office efforts have focused on three priorities this past year:

- Strengthening collaborations with professional organizations, academia, and local health partners
- Promoting public health nurse workforce development through workshops, conferences, and training programs that include Continuing Education Units and transcripts
- Continuing to enhance information exchange networks with nurses working in public health and affiliated professional organizations

### Projects/Issues Addressed This Year:

- **Strengthening collaborations with:**
  - The Connecticut Association of Public Health Nurses: During the past year collaborative efforts with the CAPHN have focused on highlighting of some of the practicum and student projects that strive to nurture the next generations of public health nurses. Various learning opportunities for the graduate and under-graduate nursing students have been showcased through poster presentations. In addition an overview of some of the experiences were included in presentations during the VOHPN May 2008 and December 2008 seminars. Collectively, the DPH VOPHN and CAPHN, have worked with faculty from five universities (i.e., Schools of Nursing and Nursing Departments) that have tracks for Community/Public Health Nursing. More than 100 students presented information regarding projects they have completed. The schools included: Fairfield University, Quinnipiac University, Sacred Heart University, University of Connecticut, and University of Hartford.
  - The Black Nurses Association: As part of Lisa Davis' Robert Woods Johnson Fellowship Program and a member of the VOPHN, the CT DPH collaborated with the Southern and Northern CT Chapters of the Black Nurses Association to convene two separate evening forums to discuss nursing leadership and another to showcase the diversity of careers in the field of nursing. The Northern event was attended by 110+ participants including students, parents, and faculty of the High School Nursing Academy. The Southern Chapter event focused on leadership and included presentations from Linda Spivak, RN,

MSN, VP Patient Services Hartford Hospital and Barbara Guthrie, RN, PHD, FAAN, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Yale University School of Nursing.

- **Nursing Coalitions/Statewide Collaborative:** The VOPHN is a member of the newly organized Connecticut Nursing Collaborative. The mission of this group is to advance the collective influence of nursing in the state. The group was convened to enhance networking and promote collaboration between its member organizations. Organizations that are represented on the Collaborative include the CT League for Nursing, CT Nurses Association, Black Nurses Association, CT Association of Public Health Nurses, CT Association of Nurse Executives and the CT DPH VOPPHN. The CT Chapter of Chi Eta Phi Nursing Sorority will also be joining the Collaborative at future meetings. The CT Student Nurses Association, Sigma Theta Tau, and the CT School Nurses Association.
  
- ***Public Health Nursing Workforce Development:***
  - **Continuing Education:** The VOPHN staff continued to work with the DPH Workforce and Professional Development office to promote education opportunities focusing on nurses and integration with the TRAIN Connecticut on-line services. DPH is licensed as a continuing education provider by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET), which is recognized by the American Nurses Association for credible continuing education.
  
  - **Hartford High School Nursing Academy:** DPH Nurses, including a VOPHN member, have volunteered to function as mentors for the newly formed Hartford Public High School Nursing Academy. The mission of the Nursing Academy is to prepare young men and women to successfully pursue a baccalaureate degree in nursing or a closely related health field. This is the only High School Nursing Academy in Connecticut and is currently in its first year of operation.
  
  - **Promotional Activities:** The Workforce and Professional Development office has included the VOPHN members as a guest speaker to highlight public health nursing roles as part of the orientation programs for college students. In addition, the VOPHN has coordinated guest speakers to highlight the roles of nurses working in health departments (DPH and local health) by request to various universities and colleges with nursing program tracks for Community/Public Health Nursing.
  
- ***Information Exchange:*** Facilitating the timely exchange of information is one of the main areas that the VOPHN has been able to be a viable link and asset for nurses across the agency, academia, the local public health nurses and community partners. Attendees of the public health nursing workshops and conferences are included in the evolving distribution networks specific to public health nurses. In addition, the VOPHN has a new web page that is linked to the DPH home page and located with the index of programs. The new web page includes an introduction to the VOPHN, links to resource materials, and power point presentations from earlier conferences.
  
- ***Updates on some of the Public Health Initiative lead by Public Health Nurses:***
  - **Sickle Cell Disease Awareness:** DPH nurses participate on the Sickle Cell Disease Consortium Emergency Department Protocol Workgroup. This group was recently convened to review best practices and standards of care for the provision of timely and quality services for patients with sickle cell disease. It is anticipated that a standardized protocol will be adopted by hospitals statewide.
  
  - **Resources for Healthcare Providers:** "Frequently Asked Questions for Emergency Situations" was drafted by attorneys at the Department of Public Health, to provide easily accessible and understandable answers to questions that are frequently asked concerning emergency preparedness in relation to the Connecticut General Statutes. The questions and answers incorporate legal requirements as well as policies and plans that have been developed to date, and includes information on the following general subject areas: Definitions and Declarations; Quarantine and Isolation; Licensing Issues; Vaccinations and Antivirals; Supply Shortages; Mass Dispensing; HIPAA Issues; Liability and Compensation Issues; Standards of Care; and Death Certificates. Frequently used acronyms are also listed and defined. It is anticipated that this document will be revised from time to time to include additional information as it becomes available.

- Promoting Standardized Services: In June of 2008, the DPH conducted the State Public Health System Performance Assessment, becoming the 24<sup>th</sup> state in the nation to participate in the National Public Health Performance Standards Program. The results from this assessment are being regarded as a baseline and a call to action for the state to move forward with performance standards and quality improvement initiative. Members of the VOPHN have been instrumental in moving this initiative forward.

#### Projects/Issues Pending:

- Standards of Care in Statewide Emergencies: DPH nurse leaders helped convened a group of stakeholders to develop a white paper of guiding principles for healthcare institutions in statewide emergencies that result in shortages of personnel, equipment and supplies. Based on the scenario of pandemic influenza, guiding ethical principles, based on the Canadian (SARS) model, various waivers of state laws and regulations, and principles for allocation of scarce resources are being developed. The Connecticut group will then pilot test the principles with the public as well as stakeholders and make final revisions.
- Public Health Nursing Orientation Program: As a member of the VOPHN, the Local Public Health Nurse Liaison continues to work with staff from the various programs within DPH to determine key areas specific to nurses to develop an orientation. A resource manual of materials from the programs to include regulations and forms has evolved, to include an introduction to the performance considerations for core competencies. Feedback from nurses new to local health has been solicited and is being used to refine further.
- Development of a *Public Health Nurses in Action Portfolio* showcasing the diverse roles of nurses in Connecticut's public health system. Examples continued to be collected and considered for portfolio.

#### Issues & Special Concerns for Public Health Nursing ... in Connecticut:

- Shrinking funds in relation to the current economic strain with competing priorities for the limited resources provide challenge to sustain current services, as well as gaining support for building infrastructure
- Aging workforce with concerns for public health nursing capacity as nurses retire
- Nursing shortage and lack of incentives (i.e., neither financial, advancement, or recognition) for nurse to pursue continued or advanced academic preparation or certification in public/community health nursing
- Lack of standardized provision of public health services and programs in health departments (i.e., State and Local)
- Continued differences in capacity of Connecticut's local health infrastructure to carry out services and support for staff/ resources in municipalities and health districts
- Challenges with clearly defining the relationship of the public health nurses' impact with providing preventives services for community activities (i.e., need for data to clarify impact, distinguish influence)
- Unions limiting possibilities for nurses working in public health with positions based on a 'medical model' and traditional institution-based health care settings