

Purpose/Aims: The purpose of this study is to survey nursing education programs in the Western United States to evaluate the presence of curricular content related to environment, sustainability and climate change.

Rationale/Background: Numerous studies released over the past 30 years by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have reinforced the health hazards associated with climate change. Significant health issues related to climate change may include those from direct impacts (heat waves) and indirect impacts (such as poor air quality, enhanced storms and hurricanes, changes in agriculture, and impacts to water supplies). Nursing students need to be educated about these impacts, and how nursing's advocacy role could play a part in both mitigation of risk and adaptation to a new climate reality. Because these areas are typically not addressed in undergraduate nursing programs, it is important to identify what is currently being taught in order to assess the need for inclusion of specific content on this set of topics.

Methods: Based on research conducted in Canada in 2010 (Powers & Kennedy), the current study utilizes a survey tool containing questions regarding education of nursing students about climate change, environmental sustainability, 'green initiatives' undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or pollutions at the program/school of nursing, and formal committees to address such issues at the program/school/ or college/university level. An initial outreach to nursing education programs throughout the West was undertaken to identify the best respondent at each program, school or college of nursing. The researcher has partnered with a social & economic sciences research center at her university to deploy the survey tool to the revised list of respondents.

Results: Eighty-one (out of 213) programs of nursing responded (38%). The majority of respondents represented public organizations (71%) with a student body in excess of 1000.

Implications: Nursing students currently being educated will be the nurse professionals who will be delivering care to populations that are very likely to be exposed to increasing health threats from a changing climate. An example of this is the growing recurrence of wildfire smoke throughout many locations in the West for extended periods of time in the summer months. Nurses armed with knowledge can assist clients to make informed decisions about how best to remain healthy in the face of rising temperatures, impaired air quality, and diseases such as West Nile virus that are intruding into more northern latitudes as the vector habitat changes.