

Nursing Network on Violence Against Women

Violence against women results in serious health and social problems for women and children. Nurses are often the first contact abused women have with professionals in the health care system. For this reason, nursing is one of the disciplines with the greatest potential for significantly intervening with victims of violence.

In response to this challenge, 150 people from the United States and Canada attended the First National Nursing Conference on Violence Against Women which was held November 1 through 3, 1985 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. This conference provided a wonderful opportunity for nurses and other health care providers to meet and share their common experiences and concerns. The purpose of this national nursing conference was to foster dissemination of knowledge, current research, and innovative clinical and educational strategies.

The conference was organized by Peggy Perri, R.N., M.Ed., and Christine King, R.N., M.S., with the efforts and support of a multidisciplinary planning committee which included nurses, health educators, social workers, therapists, and activists in the violence against women movement. The conference was sponsored by the Divisions of Nursing and Continuing Education at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and received wide support from the nursing and feminist communities.

The conference convened Friday evening, November 1, with a report from nursing colleagues who participated in the Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health which took place in Leesburg, Virginia in October. Ann Burgess, R.N., D.N.Sc., Laura McKenna, R.N., Ph.D., Jacqueline Campbell, R.N., M.S., Janice Humphreys, R.N., M.S., and Barbara Parker, R.N., M.S., provided an excellent synopsis of the Surgeon General's meeting, highlighting the recommendations on rape, battering, child sexual assault, and elder abuse. The keynote address was delivered Saturday morning by Dr. Ann Burgess, van Ameringen Professor in Psychiatric Nursing, University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Burgess is a nursing researcher who is widely recognized in the health care field for her research on rape and child sexual assault. Forty-three scholarly presentations were offered on topics which emphasized the specific issues of violence against women and their impact on past, present, and future trends in nursing and health care aimed at eliminating violence against women.

Conference organizers made a concerted effort to include a variety of mediums by which nurses could examine these issues. Therefore, in addition to the excellent presentations, conference participants attended a puppet production "Who Do You Tell" on the topic of child sexual abuse prevention presented by Geraldine Crisci and Sara Elston; a dramatization on incest, "We Promised Not To Tell," by Kol and Sivia; and a martial arts demonstration by the Valley Women's Martial Arts. Many exhibitors and a media festival provided the opportunity for nurses to explore the resources available for education and prevention at the local, state, and national level. In a commitment to assure access for women to attend this conference, child care was provided for all events.

The conference concluded with a networking session geared to forming a strong and committed network of nurses and health care providers who are working to eradicate violence against women. A selection of papers from the conference will be published in a forthcoming

issue of the Journal of Interpersonal Violence. All of us who participated in this conference left not only with more knowledge but found the experience to be both personally affirming and professionally supportive. We believe that our efforts will continue to be instrumental and professionally empowering.

As a result of this conference, the nursing profession now has a national network of nurses committed to furthering the development of creative and supportive responses to the health care needs of those affected by violence in our lives. Nursing Network on Violence Against Women (NNVAW) is this newly-formed resource which will provide a forum for nurses and other health care providers involved in the areas of woman abuse to meet, share knowledge and ideas, and gain support for our work. We invite all nurses to join us in our efforts to prevent interpersonal violence and diminish the effects of such violence upon its victims. A NNVAW directory will be published and distributed this winter. If you wish to be included in this directory, please direct inquiries to Christine King and Peggy Perri, Division of Nursing, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003. Supporters of NNVAW will make an attempt to network at all major nursing and interpersonal violence conferences. Look for notices of our meetings at all conferences. Plans are also underway for the Second National Nursing Conference on Violence Against Women to be held in March 1987 at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst.

We will also have the opportunity to communicate with each other through this column, which will regularly appear in Response beginning with this issue. All readers are invited to contribute information, ideas, and suggestions for this column to Jackie Campbell, School of Nursing, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202.

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