Advocating for Environmental Health and Environmental Justice: Imperatives and Competencies for Nurse Leaders

Nelson Tuazon, DNP, DBA, RN, NEA-BC, CENP, CPHQ, CPPS, CPXP, FNAP, FACHE, FAAN
Vice President and Associate Chief Nursing Officer, University Health
Fellow, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE)

INTRODUCTION

Significant changes in healthcare continue to challenge nurse leaders. Transformational leaders have the privilege of developing nurses as future change agents. Many leaders and managers may not have the management support and leadership competencies to deal with significant problems related to environmental health and environmental justice (McClean et al., 2020). New leadership competencies including strategic agility, adaptability, and flexibility are critically needed. Eco-ethical leadership is described as a philosophical leadership perspective, rather than a set of competencies, espoused by individuals who are active and proactive agents for environmental change and sustainability. It is an integrated approach centered around sustainability, values, collaboration, justice, advocacy, and activism (McKimm & McClean, 2020). Nurse leaders are in a position to advocate for environmental health and environmental justice. Adopting a framework to environmental health based on best practices offers a promising approach in leading healthcare into the future (Kochtitzky, 2014).

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Climate change present significant issues and problems to health, well-being, and quality of life of individuals and is often linked to negative outcomes (Nicholas and Breakly, 2017). As the largest number of healthcare professionals, nurses have tremendous opportunities to be part of decisions and policies related to climate change. Many professional nursing associations, including the International Council of Nurses, have recognized the negative impact and consequences of climate change (Dion et al., 2022, McClean et al., 2020). Nursing organizations have adopted resolutions and have led initiatives to address climate change at the local, national, and global levels (Nicholas and Breakly, 2017). As members of the professional association for nurse leaders – the Texas Organization for Nursing Leadership and the American Organization for Nursing Leadership - we must examine the imperatives and competencies we need enable us to promote and advocate for environmental health and environmental justice, now and in the future.

METHODS

Kochtitzky (2014) and his colleagues developed a framework for environmental health using the premise that "best practice is supported by a rigorous process of peer-review and evaluation indicating effectiveness in improving health outcomes demonstrated through systematic reviews."

Framework for Environmental Health

REFERENCES

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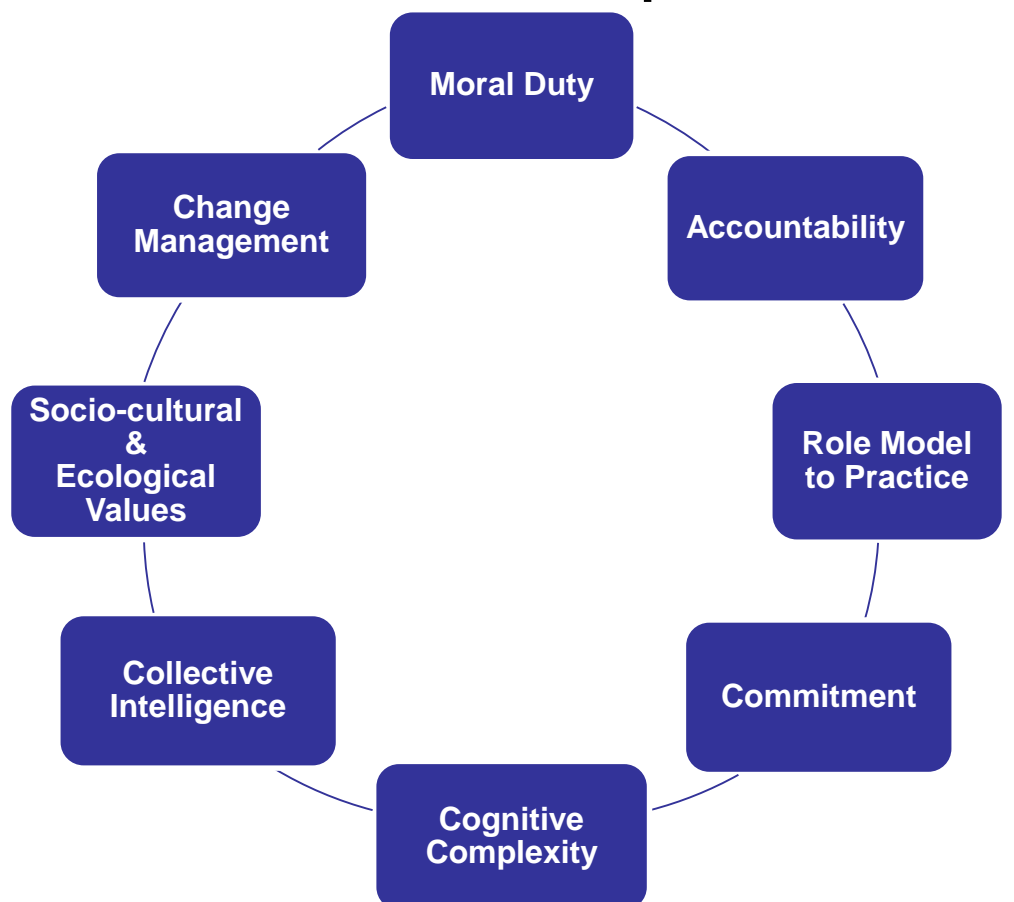
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LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Eco-Ethical Leadership Values

McKimm & McClean (2020)

RESULTS

Resources for Nurse Leaders

WHO (World Health Organization)
WHO (2021). *Climate change and health.*
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health
- Climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of health
- Climate change is the biggest health threat facing humanity
- Climate change impacts health, including illness and deaths resulting from extreme weather events

CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention)
CDC (2022). *CDC's climate and health program.*
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health
- Supports state, tribal, local, and territorial public health agencies
- CDC's Climate-Ready States and Cities Initiative helps 11 grant recipients around the nation using the five-step Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) framework.
- Funds additional partners through the Building Capacity of the Public Health System to improve population health through national, non-profit organizations.

ANHE (Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments)
ANHE (n.d.) *Our work.* https://envirn.org/our-work/
- The mission of ANHE is to promote healthy people and healthy environments by educating and leading the nursing profession, advancing research, incorporating evidence-based practice, and influencing policy.
- ANHE works on a number of different issues of interest to nurses including climate change, environmental health in nursing, water and health, food sustainability, energy and health and others.

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Aligning Eco-Ethical Values with Nursing Practice, Scholarship, and Leadership

- Critically examine the **single-use (disposable) versus re-use policy** to achieve key performance indicators on quality, safety, and efficiency with due consideration to the environmental impact of hospital wastes (*Moral duty and Role Model to Practice*).
- Adopt a conceptual framework for planning and improving **evidence-based practices** related to environmental health and environmental justice *(Collective intelligence and Cognitive complexity).*
- Develop **specific competencies for nurse leaders** related to environmental health and environmental justice that are aligned with the AONL Nurse Leader Competencies *(Accountability and Commitment).*
- Formulate **position or policy statements** on environmental health and environmental health incorporating social determinants of health *(Socio-Cultural and Ecological Values).*
- Incorporate concepts of environmental health and environmental justice in **formal and informal educational** programs *(Collective intelligence).*
- Collaborate with professional and healthcare organizations to **reduce waste and increase sustainability** in healthcare settings *(Change Management).*

Contact: Nelson.Tuazon@uhs-sa.com