

Happenings

Nursing Network on Violence against Women, International

Nancy Glass

Introduction

The Nursing Network on Violence against Women, International (NNVAWI), is a not-for-profit, volunteer organization founded in 1985 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst during the first National Nursing Conference on Violence against Women. Its mission is to contribute to the elimination of violence against women through education, practice, research, and public policy. Since 1985, the Network has widened its national focus to include education, practice, and research collaboration with nurses and other health professionals in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, England, and South Africa. Thus it is a truly international effort at eliminating violence against women.

14th International Conference and Award Recipients

One of the priorities of NNVAWI is the sponsorship of international conferences that link researchers, educators, providers, and advocates working in the area of violence against women. In April 2006 NNVAWI sponsored its 14th international conference, *Joining Forces, Joining Voices: Including Diverse Peoples and Communities in Violence Prevention Research, Practice and Advocacy*. Two hundred nurses, physicians, researchers, victim advocates, community activists, social workers, mental health counsellors, and students gathered in Portland, Oregon, to share innovative research and best practices centring on collaboration among health and human service providers, violence prevention/intervention advocates, and diverse communities so that women and children can live longer, healthier lives.

Among those attending the conference were three individuals recognized for their outstanding contributions to ending violence against women through their teaching, practice, and research. Barbara Zust,

Assistant Professor of Nursing at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, was awarded the NNVAWI Excellence in Education award. Dr. Zust was recognized for developing and implementing two innovative undergraduate courses on intimate partner violence that not only educate students on issues related to violence against women but also challenge students to examine their own beliefs and values in relation to the problem and contribute to active solutions in their communities.

Phyllis Sharps, Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, was awarded the NNVAWI Excellence in Practice award. Dr. Sharps was recognized for her outstanding clinical practice and supervision of students in providing health care to battered women and their children at the House of Ruth shelter clinic in Baltimore, Maryland.

Marilyn Merritt-Gray, Professor at the University of New Brunswick School of Nursing, was awarded the NNVAWI Excellence in Research award. Professor Merritt-Gray was recognized for the quality of her empirical work and her demonstrated excellence in working with communities and in applying research to policy and practice.

NNVAWI Leadership

During the 2006 conference, Network members elected new officers and board members to serve a two-year term (2006–08). These officers and board members, who come from Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, are Nancy Glass, PhD, MPH, RN, President; Tracy Evanson, PhD, RN, Vice-President; Barbara Zust, PhD, RN, Secretary; Natalie McClain, PhD, RN, Treasurer; and members-at-large Nancy Fishwick, DNSc, CNM, RN; Patti Janssen, PhD, MPH, RN; Ursula Kelly, PhD, MSN, ANP, CS, RN; Annie Lewis-O'Connor, PhD, MSN, APRN; and Jane Koziol-McLain, PhD, RN.

The officers, members-at-large, and membership recognize the outstanding leadership of Janice Humphreys, PhD, RN, FAAN. Dr. Humphreys served as President of NNVAWI for two terms (2002–06) and will continue to support and enhance the mission and work of the organization in her role as Past President.

15th International Conference

Plans are already underway for NNVAWI's 15th international conference. The School of Nursing at the University of Western Ontario will host this event, *Complexities and Diversities: Creating Change in a Global Context*, on October 18–20, 2007, at the Hilton Hotel in London, Ontario. Please mark the dates for this exciting conference on your calendar.

Call to Action

I would like to share a concern that has arisen in the United States, in the hope that our colleagues in Canada and around the world will prevent a similar situation from occurring in their own countries. Nurse scientists who have been involved in the development of our collective understanding of prevention and intervention strategies and programs to reduce health disparities for survivors of violence (e.g., intimate partner violence, workplace violence, sexual violence) have been informed by the National Institutes for Health/National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) staff that they should not seek funding for themselves or their PhD students, as eliminating violence against women and learning more about how violence influences health and health care are not relevant to the strategic plan of the Institute.

Recently, a well-qualified PhD student application for funding was turned down (even though it was scored well within funding range), because staff decided the study did not match the strategic plan of NINR, essentially overruling the scientific review process on which we all depend for objectivity. This decision by NINR staff is worrisome, in three respects. First, it reflects a narrow and limited understanding of research in the area of violence against women and children. In the case of this particular application, the study aims to develop an intervention based on survivors' information and resource needs, and the facilitators and barriers for abuse disclosure and help-seeking during pregnancy. Violence in pregnancy represents a serious threat to the health of both mother and child. Pregnancy also represents a significant opportunity for intervention, as it may be the only time in a woman's life when she has frequent contact with nurses.

The study both builds upon and extends the solid body of nursing science in violence, by developing an intervention that is both pregnancy-specific and developed collaboratively with survivors. Further, the study proposes to engage racial and ethnically diverse and impoverished women, those who are the most vulnerable to violence and its consequences and the least likely to disclose abuse or access formal resources. Therefore, the study is directly linked to the NINR strategy to address and eliminate health disparities.

Interventions to reduce disparities in health access, health-care quality, and health outcomes are not simple — there is no targeted therapy. To eliminate health disparities, researchers and funders must be committed to understanding the effects of intersectionality of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation on the health of individuals, families, and communities. To suggest that nurse researchers and promising PhD students can develop interventions to reduce disparities in pregnancy

outcomes without addressing gender-based violence is to show a lack of understanding of the complexity of health disparities and violence against women. Although the study received an excellent score from an objective scientific review process, the applicant was told by staff that it put too much emphasis on violence and abuse and therefore was inconsistent with NINR's funding priorities.

Second, we place the integrity of the scientific review process in jeopardy when we allow proposals with the highest scientific merit to go unfunded because staff (who may or may not have experience or expertise in the area of research) decide to overrule the process. Third, NINR staff decisions to not fund promising scholars affects our efforts to train new investigators in violence research as well as to address the critical shortage of nursing teachers and researchers.

As a nurse researcher committed to the elimination of violence against women and children, I am clearly biased in my position on the attitude of NINR staff towards our students and our science. However, it is important for us to call our nursing colleagues to action: it may be your science or your students' science that is the next to be removed from funding consideration by the staff of national and international funding agencies.

Join NNVAWI

Whether you are renewing your NNVAWI membership or considering joining for the first time, I encourage you to be part of this innovative group of individuals working collaboratively to eliminate violence against women. You can find information on NNVAWI and membership forms at www.nnvawi.org, or contact us at 1-888-909-9993.

Nancy Glass, PhD, MPH, RN, is Associate Professor, School of Nursing, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, United States; Principal Investigator of studies related to woman abuse funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and President, Nursing Network on Violence against Women, International.