

Kansas Parish Nurses: Assessing and Addressing the Needs of the Chronically Ill and Their Families

Executive Summary

Prepared for

United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

LIFE Project Foundation



August 2005

Kansas Parish Nurses: Assessing and Addressing the Needs of the Chronically Ill and Their Families

Executive Summary

The Kansas LIFE Project received funding from the United Methodist Health Ministry fund to engage Kansas parish nurses in a process of engagement, assessment and planning related to the role of parish nurses in meeting the needs of Kansans living with chronic illness. In this grant, the LIFE Project specified that the “primary outcomes” of the project would include “engaging parish nurses in envisioning action and prioritizing needs” and “generating recommendations for action.”

A central finding of the process comes in knowing that almost all parish nurses recognize the immensity of issues facing chronically ill Kansans, believe that there is a need for a parish nurse organization and agree that the organization needs to be staffed with professional and support staff. Further, there is great interest in having the staff site serve as a resource center, where parish nurses have access to a variety of resources. While the conversations of the day were repeatedly focused on meeting the needs of the chronically ill, parish nurses clearly value their functions in promoting health and wellness for all congregants.

With more than 1300 nurses in the database of the Kansas parish nurses, the realized and potential strength of these individuals is dramatically increased by strengthening the coordination and communication among the nurses, the congregations and the resources and opportunities that they have. The majority of parish nurses work few hours and without pay, and these two realities increase the need for staffing and coordination as critically important functions.

A central recommendation from the process is that funding be found to support both staff and resources to support and strengthen the work of the parish nurses and to focus their efforts on meeting the needs of the growing numbers of parishioners living with chronic illnesses.

The findings of this process come from the sharing of the participants in the planning process.

Major Findings and Recommendations Kansas Parish Nurses: Assessing and Addressing the Needs of the Chronically Ill and Their Families	
FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION
1. Kansas Parish Nurse Profile	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 91 participants in the planning process, 84% receive no salary for their work and serve as volunteers. Only one of the nurses receives a fulltime salary. • Fully 55% of the participants have been parish nurses for five or fewer years and only 1.5% have served for more than 15 years. • 61.5% of the participants work 5 or fewer hours per week in their role as parish nurses and only 8.5% work more than 20 hours per week. 	<p>The profile of parish nurses indicates the importance of staff function in maintaining and strengthening communications and education processes and in providing tools to support parish nurses in their work.</p>
2. Kansas Parish Nurses' Assessment of Needs of Chronically Ill Patients	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most parish nurses agree that chronically ill patients have multiple and complex needs that demand and deserve more services than they are prepared to give. • Needs of patients and families include medical, emotional, social and spiritual needs and parish nurses express concerns about their resources and areas of expertise. 	<p>Kansas parish nurses are well aware of needs and express a need for support in terms of meeting the many needs of chronically ill patients and serve in an important role to recognize and address these needs.</p>
3. Kansas Parish Nurses' Assessment of Preparedness: Strengths	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish nurses note that their being available and offering one-on-one support are strengths of their ministry. • Provision of education, advocacy and support are critical to the work of the parish nurse. • Many parish nurses recognize that the support of the pastor is a major bridge to their work. 	<p>Kansas nurses rightly recognize the ministry that their presence offers to chronically ill Kansans.</p> <p>The support of the pastor is critical to successful parish nursing.</p>

<p>4. Kansas Parish Nurses' Assessment of Preparedness: Needs</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all of the participants agreed that a lack of time, energy and money are key limitations to their ministries. • Many parish nurses recognize that the lack of support of the pastor is a major barrier in their work. • Parish nurses express a need for better tools and education in understanding and using interventions designed to support spiritual growth and spiritual issues, including prayer. • Parish nurses express concerns about their and the congregation's skills to work with people with mental illness. • Many parish nurses feel a need for tools to help with needs assessment and documentation. • Parish nurses often express a concern that people do not know who they are or what they do. 	<p>Kansas parish nurses consistently expressed their desire to more effectively minister to chronically ill and their need for staff, resource support and skills to do so.</p>
<p>5. Kansas Parish Nurses' Assessment of What They Believe Would Provide Most Support to Them in Their Ministries</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish nurses shared a clear consensus that staff and support services are critical to their ministries. • Parish nurses express a need for resources to support them, education and networking opportunities. • Parish nurses need more volunteers within their own congregations. • Parish nurses need support from pastors. 	<p>Because of the challenges faced by parish nurses, and the relatively few hours most parish nurses work, staff and support systems are critical. Prepared resources enable parish nurses to extend their presence and reach more people.</p> <p>Support from pastors is important to address and active engagement of pastors is critical to successful parish nursing.</p>

<p>6. Kansas Parish Nurses Assessment of Their Statewide Organization, Structure and Support Services</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish nurses agree that a strong statewide organization is important for them and that the state organization dramatically impacts the work of individual parish nurses. • Parish nurses clearly express a desire to find ways to fund professional staff (JoVeta Wescott) and support staff. • Parish nurses express their desires to increase both the resources available to them and their access to these resources • Parish nurses would like to better utilize the Internet and a website. • Health insurance for parish nurses is a need identified by some parish nurses. • Funding for basic equipment is important for many parish nurses. 	<p>Parish nurses clearly identify a need for a strong state organization and connect their individual effectiveness to the presence and support of a state parish nurses group.</p> <p>Kansas parish nurses express a clear need for resources – physical and cyber—and education.</p> <p>Parish nurses express a need for assessment and documentation tools.</p>

Recommendations for Action:

- Secure funding for and employ professional and support staff for the Kansas parish nurse organization. Specify specific functions for addressing needs of the chronically ill. Funding for staff will need to be secured before any of the other recommendations can be moved forward with significant strength.
- Create a statewide steering committee, with regional representatives, that will help:
 - Identify priorities for the role of the staff for the Kansas Parish Nurse organization in improving care to the chronically ill
 - Review the educational offerings and make suggestions of topics, locations, speakers, etc.
 - Identify resources available and assess resources needed.
- Under the leadership of the staff, adapt and/or create needs assessment and documentation tools to support the work of the parish nurses as they minister to chronically ill patients and families. Include assessment of physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs..
- Under the leadership of the staff, identify key strategies to engage and activate pastoral support for parish nurses, foster better pastoral understanding of needs of the chronically ill and support fuller understanding of the importance of pastor/parish nurse partnerships
- Create educational opportunities and tools to increase parish nurses' skills in addressing spiritual needs and issues.
- Strengthen the implementation of an orientation program for new parish nurses and include skills and tools for understanding and addressing the needs of the chronically ill.
- Explore tools and processes to make the work and role of the parish nurse more visible and better understood.
- Create a parish nurse resource guide that includes Internet and other resources.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration with other groups and resources.
- Create, train and maintain a statewide steering committee, with regional representation, that helps staff with outreach and engagement and shares the tasks of leadership.
- Explore organizational practices and strategies that support shared leadership, shared benefit and shared costs. (Include consideration of dues, contributions toward resources, etc.)

- Assure that needs of the chronically ill are well tended to within the parish nurse role.
- Develop skills and expertise in advance care planning and honoring of wishes.
- Develop and/or adapt curriculum, tools and materials about the needs of the chronically ill, resource materials to help meet the needs and best practices.
- Develop a strategic plan to engage parish nurses in ongoing training to strengthen ministry and outreach to those living with chronic illness.