Editorial

August is Women’s Month: a chance to start living healthier

Women’s Day, Women’s Month and women’s Health. That is what August is all about in South Africa. The health calendar for the second semester of each year focuses on topics such as breast cancer, cervical cancer, heart disease and AIDS. The health industry and numerous other employers use this opportunity to teach their workers about healthy living. Hospitals and clinics organise campaigns to contribute to improving the health status of the country. Where do we as nurses fit into this picture? We are very creative in assisting with and organising health education programmes, but do we ever stand back and focus on our own health and the way we live?

At the May 2012 conference of the Forum for Professional Nurse Leaders, Dr Christo du Preez gave the delegates some useful tips on what we can do to improve our own health:

- Exercise: Start by walking around the block once a week, and increase the distance or frequency slowly but steadily. Try to involve the dog, family or colleagues to make it an enjoyable event.
- Diet: Avoid strict diets, starting by eating three to five servings of fruit and vegetables per day.
- Water: Drink 1.5–2 litres (8-10 medium glasses) of water every day.
- Smoking: Start off by reducing the cigarettes you smoke by only one per day, and then gradually keep on until you’ve quit.
- Alcohol intake: Reduce your daily intake gradually.

Healthy living, however, does not begin and end with five tips for nurses. It also includes the management of fatigue. Claire Caruso (PhD, RN) provides some interesting information in her article “Running on empty: Fatigue and healthcare professionals: The consequences of inadequate sleep”. (Available from: http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/768414?src=mp&spon=38).

The US Department of Health and Human Services includes sleep health as a target in Healthy People 2020, the 10-year health plan for the United States. The objective is to “increase public knowledge of how adequate sleep and treatment of sleep disorders improve health, productivity, wellness, quality of life, and safety on roads and in the workplace.”

The Joint Commission gave several suggestions in a sentinel alert for healthcare organisations to reduce risks from fatigue:
- Examine and improve work schedules, staffing, and hand-off processes.
- Consider fatigue as a factor in all adverse events.
- Involve staff in the design of their schedules.
- Create and implement a fatigue management plan.
- Educate staff about sleep and fatigue.
- Support staff members who work long shifts.
- Encourage organisations that allow naps during the work shift to provide good sleep environments and adequate release from work responsibilities.

The role of the nurse in advocating good health and to support family, friends and patients in very difficult times cannot be ignored. For us to be the support structure in the community and in the workplace, we have to be strong, energetic and well balanced ourselves. Let us all use Women’s Month as our trigger to start a new way of living!

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