

Statement on Smallpox Vaccination and Emergency Preparedness

June 1, 2003

Endorsed by Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations

The Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations (ANA Congress on Nursing Practice & Economics; Association of Community Health Nursing Educators; American Public Health Association, Public Health Nursing Section; Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing) affirms that public health nurses are committed to the safe, efficient implementation of the National Smallpox Vaccination Program based on scientific review and feedback of each phase. Public health nurses support the efforts advocated by the American Public Health Association and the American Nurses Association for adequate compensation, liability protection, and resources for health care workers who volunteer for participation in the program. The Quad Council endorses the following:

- Public health nurses have expertise in assessment, community health education, community coordination and collaboration, and advocacy of community perspective and priorities. As the single largest discipline in public health, nurses play a key role in the development of policies and plans for preparedness in public health emergencies. There is a strong role for nurses as team members and leaders in public health emergency preparedness and response. At the same time, the emphasis of public health nurses in these circumstances should be in terms of developing partnerships in communities and across sectors to develop a coordinated response to a public health emergency that utilizes shared resources and expertise.
- Smallpox and bioterrorism-related programs must be sufficiently funded. Such programs must have a dual use benefit, enhancing existing systems rather than creating an additional system that responds to a specific disease threat. Public health systems have existing models with proven effectiveness in disease control, and these systems should be used for broadly improving our effectiveness in public health emergency response. Existing public health structures which have proven expertise and effectiveness and which are staffed by public health providers with expertise in population level disease monitoring and response, infection control, and education/communication among diverse populations have been underutilized in many settings. Communities are best protected by an experienced nursing workforce working with other community agencies around a broader, coordinated response to emerging diseases that has multiple uses and enduring value over time.
- A national effort is needed to provide mass public health education to rectify the documented misinformation currently held by a large number of Americans faced with the prospect of volunteering to receive smallpox immunization in the face of a bioterrorist attack. Health education about public health threats must be accurate, based on current science, developmentally and educationally appropriate, and offered in multiple languages. Public fear is minimized when

health risks and benefits of protective measures and exposure risk are understood and discussed.

- Public health nurses and health professionals must conduct accurate and efficient risk assessment of potential smallpox vaccine recipients based on current, scientifically based information. We support continued, detailed monitoring by the CDC and the scientific community of adverse reactions to the vaccine, and call on all public health workers involved in the Smallpox Vaccine Program to provide detailed, prompt reports to the CDC. This information is essential to evaluate the phases of the program, and must be available and widely disseminated to the public and the public health workforce on a regular basis.
- The Quad Council acknowledges that there are many excellent education materials available to nurses who provide population-focused care. Most public health nurses are well informed about smallpox, however some areas have insufficient information systems in place. Agencies require adequate resources to provide current and timely information about protective measures and mass immunization response plans, particularly in rural and urban areas throughout the United States. Efficient information systems must be in place to access constantly emerging information that can be disseminated quickly to health care workers.
- Public health nurses have a primary role in educating other nurses and health care professionals about planning, implementing, and evaluating mass immunizations. In addition to training others in proper vaccine technique, monitoring of adverse reactions, and protecting others from exposure, public health nurses can continue to assist other partners to prepare for a wide variety of public health threats by emphasizing the principles involved with preparedness and response of public health threats. On-line “train the trainer programs” can assist public health nurses provide training sessions to other health care workers.
- Academic and practice partnerships between nursing, medical, and public health schools, local public health departments, and state public health associations can provide an effective means of disseminating and interpreting emergency preparedness information from other federal agencies and scientific sources, and assist with professional development opportunities.
- Nurses who lack basic public health science knowledge and skills require continuing education and professional development so that they are prepared to assist public health efforts conducted to prevent, prepare, or respond to emergencies.