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NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK: AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE CAREERS BEHIND PUBLIC HEALTH IN FLORIDA AND THE PEOPLE WHO DO THEM

Public Health Nurses: Patient Focused, Community Driven

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Tallahassee, Fla. – Florida has 67 county health departments and in each one, you will find a team of dedicated public health nurses. Public health nurses are a little different than the nurses you meet at your doctor’s office or in the hospital. Public health nursing is both a science and an art that impacts so much more than just one patient because of its focus on population health.

Public health nurses work with individuals, families and communities as a whole to prevent disease and promote the overall health of an area. Public health nurses are on the front lines every day and they are the backbone of public health.

It’s hard to describe a day in the life of a public health nurse because, “no two days are alike” says Virginia Crandall, Senior Community Health Nursing Director for the Florida Department of Health in Hernando County. “Whether it is Ebola, Zika, budget challenges, hurricanes, clinic operations, dog bites, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases or HIV, there is always a new challenge and a new opportunity to make a positive difference.”

Crandall’s journey in public health began in 1988 as a Community Health Nurse where she worked in clinics and out in the community. She enjoyed being able to promote health in both settings and she fell in love with the variety of the work. That variety of work and the opportunity to meet people in the community and help them to improve their health and understanding of their medical programs has kept Crandall in the field of public health nursing for nearly 30 years.

Nursing is a huge part of the public health workforce and the training nurses receive in school gives them the skills needed to successfully improve public health. Public health nurses work in clinics to provide immunizations, conduct testing for diseases and infections, help people manage chronic conditions like diabetes and asthma and help people achieve a healthy lifestyle. Public health nurses also help communities prepare for natural disasters and assist in disaster relief efforts.

If you are considering a career in nursing, Crandall says “public health nursing is a great way to be a nurse.” You get to use your nursing knowledge and judgement more independently than in many other settings and while there is still the need to be efficient and effective, public health nursing is very close to nursing’s traditional roles to counsel, educate, prevent disease and promote health.

“Public health nursing really gives you the chance to help individuals become healthier, whether that’s by helping them create healthy habits or helping them get proper treatment for a medical condition, and you also have a direct impact on building a healthier community,” says Crandall. “This is the kind of work where you go home every day and know that you are truly making a difference.”

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For more information about National Public Health Week, please visit www.nphw.org.

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