Shelter Nurse (RN) Job Description for Public Health Nurses Working in General Population Shelters

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Division of Public Health
Office of the Chief Public Health Nurse

Scope of Practice

Public Health Nursing (PHN) duties will include providing nursing services to general population shelter clients consistent with the routine scope of practice for PHNs in North Carolina's local health departments (LHDs). These services include health promotion activities, providing disease education, collecting health histories, conducting nursing assessments, conducting surveillance, and when appropriate, collaborating with partners for referrals to medical facilities or outside agencies based on presenting acuity of care or ongoing condition management. The nursing process is expected to be used in all nursing activities. The PHN may assign or delegate nursing care activities to other licensed nurses and unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP] following NC Board of Nursing [1,2] guidance.

Medication Administration

The NC Board of Nursing allows RNs to recommend over-the-counter drugs (OTC) and distribute them based on the clients' complaints and the nurse's knowledge about the recommended OTC medication[3]. *Administration of any medication without a standing order or individual order is outside an RNs scope of practice.* Clients should be allowed to self-administer all medications.

Standing Orders, Policies, and Protocols

The Nurse Practice Act [5] allows RNs to practice to the full extent of their education and training. Standing orders are not required for any nursing care or support that RNs are expected to provide in a general population shelter. Because first aid and mental health first aid are included in standard nursing assessment and intervention curricula, standing orders are not required to administer these services. However, some local health departments choose to develop shelter standing orders to address basic first aid, mental health first aid, and common physical discomforts that may arise when individuals experience physical or emotional stress.

PHNs are expected to follow all applicable shelter standing orders as well as all shelter policies and protocols. In some county's LHD standing orders, policies, or protocols may also be adopted for use within shelters. When NC PHNs are deployed from one county to support shelter operations in another, they are required to work under the host county's shelter standing orders, policies and protocols, rather than those of their employing county. The host county is responsible for providing deployed PHNs with Just-In-Time- Training on the applicable standing orders, policies and protocols upon arrival.

Shelter Duty Eligibility Requirements:

- CPR and AED Certification
- Unencumbered NC RN license or approved to practice via the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC)[6]

Expectations and activities within the scope of practice for deployed PHNs assigned to general population shelters:

Education

- Delivering education, resources, and guidance to shelter staff and clients regarding communicable and non-communicable disease prevention and management.
- Supporting clients in understanding the effects of the disaster on their physical health and mental well-being.

Surveillance

- Monitoring on-site infection control practices to ensure adherence to established standards.
- Conducting surveillance for potential communicable disease outbreaks.
- Reporting any suspected or confirmed communicable disease outbreaks to the NC Division of Public Health.
- Initiating isolation or quarantine protocols for clients exhibiting symptoms of communicable illnesses (i.e., colds, flu, or norovirus).
- Participating in disease surveillance activities, including conducting cot-to-cot assessments and communicating with hospitals and health care providers regarding signs of infectious, communicable, or reportable diseases.
- Monitoring the health status of the client population, including the presence of chronic conditions, communicable disease, and injuries.
- Evaluating the clients past medical history and any pre-existing conditions that may have been exacerbated by the emergency or by shelter occupancy.
- Assessing and monitoring for potential internal or external environmental threats to the shelter or its population.

Referral

- Conducting assessments of clients prior to admission to the shelter.
- Providing recommendations to the shelter manager when individuals present with needs that exceed the medical management capabilities of a general population shelter and engaging appropriate partners to facilitate referral to a setting capable of meeting the client's medical needs.
- Coordinating with telemedicine services or other designated resources to support appropriate placement in medical support shelter, when available.
- Facilitating referral and discharge planning for individuals departing from general population shelters.
- Assessing clients' mental health status and initiating appropriate referrals based on identified needs.

Maintaining Independence

- Administering basic first aid as needed.
- Assisting clients in obtaining special diets by coordinating with the designated food service provider.
- Supporting clients in the replacement of lost or damaged medications or durable medical equipment (DME) (i.e., wheelchairs, raised or accessible toilet seats,

canes, or walkers).
- Requesting interpretation or translation services to support effective communication for clients.
- Recommending and distributing over-the-counter medications in accordance with established protocols.
- Collaborating with Functional Assessment Support Teams (FAST) [7] to ensure that the access and functional needs of shelter clients are met and that individuals can maintain their independence.

Operations Management

- Establishing and providing clinical oversight, disease surveillance, and staffing support for general population shelters when designated as the responsible agency within the county's All-Hazards Plan.
- Maintaining accurate and complete documentation in all required records and reports.
- Setting up, managing, directing, staffing, and evaluating mass immunization clinics.

Recommended Training prior to deployment:

- Basic First Aid refresher-online https://www.ecprcertification.com/basic-first-aid-course/
- Mental Health First Aid or Psychological First Aid- online
  - Mental Health First Aid: https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/
  - Psychological First Aid: https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=596
- American Red Cross Training. Please follow the directions found on the American Red Cross (ARC) Trainings List on this webpage: https://www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/programs/local-and-community-support/office-chief-public-health-nurse/disaster-shelter-resources
  - Shelter Fundamentals v2 (7/10/2024) 1 hour
  - Disaster Cycle Services: An Overview (12/06/23) 25 minutes

Host county to provide Just- in-Time-Training (JITT) for shelter health services including:

- Procedures for completing cot-to-cot assessments using Communication, Maintaining Health, Independence, Services, Support and Self-Determination, Transportation (C-MIST) Worksheet[8] to monitor for declining health, unmet needs, and other concerns.
- Review of shelter standing orders (if applicable).
- Review of shelter policies and protocols.
- A facility tour and overview of emergency and security plans.
- Documentation requirements and protocols to ensure compliance with privacy rules, record retention and disposition.

References

1. NC Board of Nursing Position Statement: Delegation and Assignment of Nursing Activities. https://www.ncbon.com/sites/default/files/documents/2024-02/ps-delegation-and-assignment-of-nurse-activities.pdf
2. NC Board of Nursing: Decision Tree for Delegation to UAP. https://www.ncbon.com/sites/default/files/documents/2024-01/dt-delegation-to-uap.pdf
3. NC Board of Nursing Position Statement: Over-The-Counter Medications and Non-Prescriptive Devices. https://www.ncbon.com/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/ps-otc-medications-and-non-prescriptive-devices.pdf
4. NC Board of Nursing Position Statement: Standing Orders. https://www.ncbon.com/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/ps-standing-orders.pdf
5. North Carolina Board of Nursing: Nursing Practice Act. https://www.ncleg.net/enactedlegislation/statutes/html/byarticle/chapter_90/article_9a.html
6. North Carolina Board of Nursing/Nurse Licensure Compact. https://www.ncbon.com/nurse-licensure-compact
7. North Carolina Functional Assessment Support Team. https://www.ncdps.gov/ncfast
8. American Red Cross C-MIST form. https://mdch.train.org/PHEPUpdate/12-6-17/DHSCMISTWorksheet.pdf