



The “Community Health” column is intended to highlight issues and trends in community health at the local, state, and national level.

By Candace Biberston

Make a Difference through Eating Disorder Awareness

Millions of Americans in a wide range of ages battle eating disorders every day. You may even know someone personally who has been affected by disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa. The effects of an eating disorder are far reaching and include both physical and emotional symptoms. Those who struggle with an eating disorder may suffer numerous physical problems. These effects include heart failure, dehydration, hair loss, pancreatitis and even death. These detrimental outcomes make it vital for education and awareness of eating disorders be made available to everyone.

At the 2008 Annual NSNA Convention in Grapevine, TX, nursing students from MedCentral College in Mansfield, OH brought forward a resolution to increase eating disorder education and awareness. The Community Health Committee felt it was important to highlight this information. We feel student nurses can become a part of prevention and awareness education as they look to organizations and programs available to help spread the word.

There are several organizations dedicated to eating disorder awareness, education and prevention. One of the most well known is the National Eating Disorders Association (www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).

This group focuses on raising awareness and providing education regarding eating disorders. The organization is also a founding member of the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action, which helps to advance issues regarding eating disorders for legislative action. Students can become involved in the association by joining States for Treatment Access and Research (STAR), which works to improve availability of treatment. This program provides participants with information about advocacy needs that arise and what you can do to help. The organization also provides a help line (800-931-2237) to share with those you know in need.

Other groups working to help increase education and awareness of eating disorders are the Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness www.eatingdisorderinfo.org and National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Eating Disorders (ANAD) www.anad.org.

As future nurses we should be aware of information available for those who may be dealing with one of these difficult disorders. We may also take the opportunity to become involved in making sure prevention of eating disorders is stressed and treatment is available to those who seek it. There are great opportunities for student nurses to make a difference regarding eating disorders. ☺

