Community and public health nursing

Current emphasis in undergraduate nursing programs is the clear understanding of the concepts 'community' and 'aggregate'. Often, community level assessment strategies are used as a method to develop students' skills in care of aggregate groups within the community (McGary, 2003). Community can be defined as all people who live within a particular geographical location, for example the London community (McGary, 2003). Additionally, a community is made up of the formal organizations of a society, such as its institutions of family, schools, government and hospitals. A metaphor for community is 'system' in that a community has inter-related and inter-dependant structures that work together to form a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Further, the behaviors of the people making up this system are reactive to stimuli. The community as a whole can be conceived of conceptually as 'client' (McGary, 2003). A community is comprised of aggregate groups. An aggregate a can be defined as a collection of all the individuals within the community who have the same specific characteristics, for example the aggregate of older persons or families within London (Bakken, Cashen, Eneida, Mendonca, O'Brien, & Zieniewicz, 2000). Where the focus of care is on more than the single person the term aggregate is often used. In this sense, the aggregate can also be conceptualized as 'client'. The aggregate are the sub-population which share a common interest, problem or purpose. However, as an aggregate is part of a community there is an inter-relationship between the needs of the aggregate and the needs of the wider community(Bakken et al., 2000).. Hence, each of these 'clients' functions within an external environment, and incorporates and is affected by biopsychosocial factors.

To effectively differentiate between a community and aggregate is essential

for nurses to be able to provide community care and care of specific groups. The most distinguishing feature is that the community encompasses all aggregates, or segments that make up a community, whereas as an aggregate specifically identifies a particular group or segment within the community (Clemen-Stone, McGuire, & Eigsti, 2002). Whilst the community as a whole describes a collection of people who share a common geographic location, aggregate expresses the diversity of segments that exist within and inter-relate within the community (Ozbolt, Bakken, Button, & Warren, 2000). Additionally, a community functions to serve the collective needs of all, whereas an aggregate functions to meet the needs of a segment of the community (Stanhope & Lancaster, 2000).

Recently, nursing as a discipline has shifted its orientation from a focus on hospitals as places of care provision, to primary and community care provision. As such, there has been an increased emphasis on specialization of segments, or aggregates within the community (Clemen-Stone, McGuire, & Eigsti, 2002). Evidence-based nursing requires that an aggregate be operationlized in order to identify it (Parahoo, 2006). Operationalisation is the process of defining a concept in measurable terms, so that specific characteristics of the aggregate are made clear (Parahoo, 2006). For example, the aggregate of 'elderly people' is commonly operationlized as women and men, over the age of 65 years. In the design of research the aggregate would be described in the method section under 'participants' (Parahoo, 2006). For example, females and males over the age of 65 years who have been prescribed assistive devices for daily living in the past two years.

An aggregate that I would like to assess is the elderly within the community

who use internet technology. I am interested in their perceptions of their own well being, their sociality with others on and off the net, their ability to make new friends on the internet, their ability to pursue their personal interests using the www, and their computer literacy confidence and abilities. I anticipate that assessment of this aggregate would provide insight into a sometimes socially excluded group within the community, who are fast becoming the largest segments of our communities. As such their well being and social health is important at a community level for the inter-generational resources they can provide.

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