Correctional nursing’s new professional resource

ANA’s updated standards will be released in fall 2020.

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Correctional Nurses will have an updated professional resource in October 2020 when Correctional Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 3rd Edition, is published by the American Nurses Association (ANA). Enhancements include a revised definition of correctional nursing, expanded ethics content related to the 2015 Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements (the Code), updated standards and accompanying competencies content, and a proposed framework for correctional nursing.

According to the revised definition from ANA, correctional nursing is the delivery of evidence-based nursing to protect, promote, and optimize health and abilities; prevent illness and injury; facilitate healing; alleviate suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response with care and respect; and advocate for individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations under the jurisdiction of the justice system.

Correctional RNs and advanced practice RNs focus on healthcare of incarcerated individuals who are supervised by the justice system in a prison, jail, or other custody setting, including those under community supervision, such as parole and probation. Nurses in other healthcare settings may become integral healthcare team partners when the incarcerated person participates in telehealth services, is transferred for temporary or longer-term services in an external healthcare system, or is being transitioned from the justice system to community living and needs continued healthcare planning and coordination.

Correctional facilities’ primary mission is ensuring the security of people incarcerated within them and the safety of staff and public. Therefore, correctional nurses play significant healthcare advocacy roles in these diverse settings. At the end of 2018, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported an estimated 6.7 million individuals (1 in 7) in the United States were under some type of correctional supervision. This vulnerable, socially marginalized population includes approximately 2.2 million individuals detained in jails and incarcerated in prisons and an estimated 4.5 million who are supervised under community corrections.

Correctional nursing requires flexibility, attention to detail, critical thinking, a strong ability for clinical decision-making, and a sound grasp of the standards of professional nursing practice. Correctional nurses’ primary role is as patient advocates, educators, and champions for access to quality healthcare. Such activities aren’t without controversy and challenges and may cause moral distress. The Code and these guiding principles provide a framework to support correctional nursing practice:

1. Patient-centered care is at the core of practice.
2. The nursing process is fundamental.
3. Professional nurses know their correctional nursing role.
4. Correctional nurses recognize the value of teamwork and collaboration and establish partnerships.
5. A strong link exists between the professional work environment and the nurse’s ability to provide quality care and achieve optimal outcomes.
6. All correctional nurses promote quality patient care.
7. Correctional nurses demonstrate compassion and caring within secure facilities.

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