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Prism: Special Issue on Nursing Centers

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Nursing centers are ambulatory care organizations, based on a nursing model, through which clients can access nursing and other health care services directly. The centers are an answer to many of the health care dilemmas confronting policy makers and consumers today.

Care provided in nursing centers is organized in a way that supports clients in learning to care for themselves. A visit to a health care provider does not guarantee that people will take the actions needed to prevent illness or manage chronic conditions. Helping people to care more effectively for themselves requires a paradigm shift in the way care is delivered, and nurses at nursing centers are experts in an approach that is both more holistic and more anticipatory than traditional health care.

In a nursing center, clients may be surprised to be asked about their health practices and the ways they have managed illness as well as about their medical history. Each visit is focused on determining not only what may be wrong, but also in helping clients understand what is happening. Follow-up care is arranged as needed, just as in other settings. But at nursing centers, "follow up" involves more than simply future appointments. Staff are quick to provide written materials to help clients learn more about their particular health concerns. Classes are offered on topics such as parenting, coping with illness, planning for retirement, and other "lifestyle" areas. Services such as weight control programs and stress management are also available. Each nursing center develops programs based on an assessment of community needs.

The NLN Council for Nursing Centers brings together practitioners from nursing centers and other people who are interested in developing this resource. The Council hosts an annual meeting where nurses share their experiences and work together to help set a national health care agenda that incorporates nursing centers and their concerns. Videos, books, and a consultation network also are available through the Council. For more information, contact Dr. Lynda Crawford at the NLN at 800-669-9656, x404.

This issue of PRISM addresses several topics of concern to the nursing center movement and the people they serve. What are nursing centers all about? How can information systems be developed to meet each center's needs as well as foster the establishment of a national database on nursing centers? How are the centers best financed? What are the benefits of accreditation to nursing centers? The growth and development of one nursing center in Detroit highlights some of these issues and shares the excitement of their progress.

The future awaits us. We invite you to join us!