



Climate Action Nurses

Position Statement: Trauma informed care in the Anthropocene

Release Date: 12 May 2023 in recognition of all Nurses impacted by Climate Change and trauma on International Nurses Day.

Key Statement:

As the peak professional body representing climate change informed nurses, Climate Action Nurses (CAN):



Recognises Nurses and their communities experience significant rates of trauma from the increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters;



Commits to supporting the education of healthcare professionals on *trauma informed care* and supporting nurses and their communities living and working with trauma exposure that results from living in the Anthropocene;



Suggests health services embed *trauma informed* work practices, organisational structures, and leadership to prevent the re-traumatisation of individuals and communities;



Recommends organisational support for nurses who experience vicarious trauma and emotional distress from climate induced trauma.

Background and Key issues

The Anthropocene is the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on the planet's climate. Nurses must learn to adapt their practice for this era¹. As part of this, Nurses require thorough understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma related to climate change related natural disasters as they navigate life in the Anthropocene. This includes developing practices that strives to prevent re-traumatisation of themselves and those who engage with the healthcare services they provide.

Nurses, as community members, have individual experiences of trauma, but also experience vicarious trauma through exposure to extreme weather events and in dealing with the ongoing trauma of navigating life in the Anthropocene^{1,2}. Exposure to trauma is an inescapable consequence of nursing care in this time. Vicarious trauma refers to the response in the nurse that may result from the inherent trauma exposure when working with people who have experiences of trauma and can include burn-out and compassion fatigue³. Holding space for others' trauma can have a profound and long-lasting impact on the nurse through its influence in reshaping their views of themselves and the world around them.

Trauma informed care recognises that nurses and people within the community are commonly impacted by trauma and that the effects *may be lifelong*³. Re-traumatisation can occur for all trauma survivors¹. Both nurses and their communities experience significant rates of trauma from the increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters related to the climate affected Anthropocene of the 21st century.

Trauma informed care provides a safe environment for those who engage with health services, including those that work within them. Trauma informed care is founded on the principles of 4 R's⁴:

1. **Realise** the prevalence of trauma in society



2. We **Recognise** how trauma effects individuals who are engaged with our services
3. We **Respond** appropriately by apply TI care knowledge in practice
4. We **Resist** traumatisation

Those who engage with the health services provided by nurses, are commonly traumatised by both single events such as extreme weather events, or ongoing/chronic trauma caused by the ongoing threats posed by living in the Anthropocene and re-traumatisation⁵. Often, people will experience re-traumatisation through familiar sights, signs, smells, and interpersonal experiences⁶. Situations where people feel disempowered can trigger re-traumatisation, which can be collective and structural in nature, including historical and intergenerational trauma.⁶.

Trauma Informed Care extends beyond individual practices and must be structural in nature³. *Trauma informed care* must be incorporated into health service organisations at all levels, through policies, procedures, work practices and leadership to ensure a safe, trauma informed workplace and organisation. Leadership within organisations must exemplify *trauma informed leadership* including staff engagement, peer supervision, employee agreements and work practices.

Trauma informed care is not inherent nursing knowledge and nurses must educate themselves through professional development opportunities on how trauma experiences fundamentally impact the experience of, and care required for, those engaged with the service.

Recommendations

1. Nurses must 'do no harm' and adapt work practices to recognise and develop awareness that those who engage with health services, including those who deliver healthcare services, may be re-traumatised.
2. Healthcare organisations must provide professional development opportunities for all clinicians to develop knowledge on *trauma informed care* and embed the 4 Rs of trauma informed care into nursing practice.
3. *Trauma informed care* must be adopted and integrated into health service organisational structure and leadership practices. This must be reflected in values, mission statements, and work practices.
4. Organisations must support nurses' wellbeing when they experience climate related trauma.

Acknowledgements

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References

¹ Richards, C., Holmes, M., Nash, R., & Ward, A. (2023). Nursing in the Anthropocene—translating disaster nursing experience into climate crisis nurse education. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*.



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- ² Isobel, S., & Thomas, M. (2022). Vicarious trauma and nursing: An integrative review. *International journal of mental health nursing*, 31(2), 247-259.
- ³ NSW Health. (2022) *What is trauma informed care*.
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/psychosocial/principles/Pages/trauma-informed.aspx>
- ⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA). (2014). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf
- ⁵ World Economic Forum. (2023). *Here's what the trauma of extreme weather events does to our brains*.
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/climate-change-trauma-impacts-cognition-brain-study/>
- ⁶ Grossman, S., Cooper, Z., Buxton, H., Hendrickson, S., Lewis-O'Connor, A., Stevens, J., ... & Bonne, S. (2021). Trauma-informed care: recognizing and resisting re-traumatization in health care. *Trauma surgery & acute care open*, 6(1), e000815
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