

Executive Summary

Nurses adhere to a high-risk lifestyle pattern for cardiovascular disease (CVD) that has been linked to physical inactivity and unhealthy diet. Because CVD is the leading cause of death in North American women and a majority of nurses are women, they are an important population to target with health protective and disease preventive strategies. Disease risk among nurses, compounded by increasing workloads, shift work and aging, also has a negative impact on workplace absenteeism and retention.

The purpose of this pilot study was to conduct a three-month ecological, workplace intervention program comprising of physical activity, nutrition, and environmental components. The first study objective was to evaluate the program effect on selected anthropometric, physiological, and lifestyle-related behavioural outcome measures, and workplace-related absenteeism among urban and rural nurses on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Other objectives included exploring the nurses' experiences of study participation, conducting an ecological assessment, and testing the feasibility of employing the mixed methods, quasi-experimental, design and instruments in a future study. Twenty nurses completed the study, the median age was 45.3 years, 100% were female, and 90% and 10% were RNs and LPNs, respectively.

Results from the quantitative analyses produced statistically significant main effects for blood glucose, diastolic blood pressure, resting heart rate, body fat, waist-to-hip ratio, and pedometer step count. Although no differences between intervention and comparison groups could be established, the combined group scores showed considerable improvement in health outcomes. Awareness, attention to self, and motivation to act now or later emerged as sub-

themes to the dichotomous central themes of healthy and unhealthy behaviours in the qualitative analysis.

Further, while most of the health promoting initiatives and policies implemented in the hospitals and communities where nurses work, live, and play received a moderate score in the ecological assessment, many nurses who participated in focus groups expressed dissatisfaction with them. This finding emphasizes the importance of soliciting input from employees in not only evaluating such initiatives and policies, but also in designing and implementing workplace health promotion programs. As well, the study identified the need to construct fitness facilities, augmented with fitness and dietary consultation support provided by certified professionals, in hospital settings to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce cardiovascular risk factors among health care workers. The results of this study call for continued efforts to increase urban and rural nurses' involvement in physical activity and nutrition intervention programs, with an added focus on multiple risk factors, barriers for behavioural change, and the broader social context of nurses, including their families and communities.