**Population Health Nursing: Assessment and Analysis of Data**

**Week 3: Assessment of the Core**

**Welcome to Week 3**

Population assessment involves a thorough appraisal of aggregate health, and takes into consideration the community context within which the people live, work, and play. During this lesson, your learning will focus on identifying data necessary for a thorough assessment of a selected population. As part of your learning, you will conduct an assessment of a selected core population as you begin the process of aggregate-focused assessment.

**Assessment of the Core Population**

Community as Partner Model: Core

As you will remember from previous lessons, the Community as Partner Model offers a holistic framework for population assessment. At the center of this model is the "core" or people that make up the specific population undergoing assessment.

The community assessment wheel provides the assessment of segments of the Community as Partner model.

* Physical Environment
* Education
* Safety & Transportation
* Politics & Government
* Health & Social Services
* Communication
* Economics
* Recreation

The word "Core" is written within the center section.

When assessing the core, key data include the historical background of the people, as well as unique characteristics they possess (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019). The demographics and ethnicity of the people are also essential assessment findings to be determined during the appraisal of the core (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019). Values and beliefs of the core population provide important assessment data, and can be closely related to the culture and spiritual background of the people (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019).

Let's take a look at each of these elements to better understand assessment of the core:

* **History** - Understanding the historical background of the people within the community offers valuable insights into their health and well-being. Historical background also offers information to understand how the people and community may have experienced change and responded to that change over time. For example, if a particular community and core population experienced a sharp economic downturn and lost several large industries over time, the economic impact could shape health and environmental conditions.
* **Demographics** - Data obtained from local, state, or national sources, such as the United States Census Bureau, offer a snapshot of people that make up the core population. Distribution of age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity provide a picture of the people living in the area. From this information, the nurse might identify possible health strengths and needs within the population that are due to demographics. For example, a population that includes a high percentage of older adults may also experience increased health issues associated with that population.
* **Vital Statistics** - Birth and death rates can be obtained from local and state health departments, and portray that pace at which new births occur, as well as deaths within the community. In addition, trends in the mortality rates offer insight to the leading causes of death within a community (for example heart disease, cancer, or motor vehicle accidents).
* **Values, Beliefs, and Religion** - Understanding the values, beliefs, and faith or spiritual background of the core population can support the assessment process. In many cases, values and beliefs are closely interconnected with cultural heritage and practices, and in some cases may influence health status and health practices.

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment of the Core

As you will remember from earlier lessons, culturally and linguistically appropriate interactions are essential for an ethically sound and accurate assessment (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019; United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS] Office of Minority Health, n.d.). Throughout the assessment process, variables such as cultural influences, health literacy, language and communication preferences will shape data collection and the findings that result.

To assure accurate findings, maintain ethically sound practice, and promote health equity, intentional efforts to implement a culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment of the core is crucial (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019; Ervin & Kulbok, 2018). Strategies such as considering health literacy and its impact, communicating in a manner that is linguistically and culturally proficient, and assessing the influence of culture and language on the health of the population can provide a strong foundation for assessment.

The Value of Assessing the Core

Thinking back to previous lessons, you will recall that assessments can vary in scope and intent. For example, an assessment might involve a comprehensive community health assessment, or it may include a more focused assessment of a selected population. Setting-specific assessments can also take place for appraisal of population health.

In its most traditional form, the assessment of the core in the Community as Partner Model includes the people who live within a defined geographic community (Anderson & McFarlane, 2019). As we consider the different settings, contexts, and purposes for population assessment, we can build upon this concept by defining specific a specific sub-population of interest. For example, within a given community of people, perhaps there is a focus on a vulnerable subpopulation of individuals who share a common health concern might be the focus of assessment (for example: refugees, veterans, pre-school-aged children, pregnant teens, the disabled, or the homeless, just to mention a few possibilities).

In cases where a specifically defined group is the target for the assessment, the overarching core assessment provides a snapshot of the context within which the defined group resides. In addition to that broad core appraisal, steps would be taken to **expand the assessment** of the defined population in order to better understand and define their health status and identify areas of disparity (Curley & Vitale, 2016).

**Expanding Assessment of the Core**

The Value of Assessing the Core

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**Application to Practice: Core Assessment**

Planning for Practicum

An important part of your learning in the NR538 course will involve putting assessment into action and begin the process of assessing a selected population within the context of the geographic community. In many cases, these population assessment-focused learning activities and assignments may provide a foundation for practicum engagement later in the program.

Maria's Case Scenario - Assessment of the Core

 Maria is the nurse leader at the Caring Clinic. A patient-centered medical home that partners with the local public health department and a large healthcare system to promote health outcomes for individuals living with diabetes. The clinic, health department and healthcare systems are collaborating with one another to conduct a population health assessment.  
  
While all aspects of the assessment will be of value, the patients centered medical home is particularly interested in the target population of adulthood challenging chronic disease, such as adults with chronic renal failure. Maria will serve on the population assessment task force and is eager to learn more about the complex needs of this vulnerable target population.  
  
A task force has been established to conduct the population health assessment and to lead efforts towards planning, implementation and evaluation strategies to improve the health of the community. The taskforce will be applying the community as partner model, created by Anderson and MacFarlane as a framework to guide the assessment process.  
  
The Community as Partner Model, includes assessment of the core population, which lies at the center of the model. As well as assessment of a community subsystems, which influenced the health of the core population. Assessment of the core population will be an important first step for the task force. In addition to understanding the population from a broad perspective, assessment of the core will also include collection of data to better understand the health status of this target population.  
  
For example, assessment of the core will include consideration of the background, values, and beliefs of the people, demographics, and population health indicators. As well as the health-related strengths and needs that currently exist within the population. Maria is considering additional assessment data about the target population that will be needed and how information systems within the agencies can contribute to the process of data collection.  
  
Population specific data will be needed to appraise health needs and deficits and to direct action plans that will optimize health outcomes. Examples of additional data that may be needed include descriptive findings to better understand the target population of people experiencing complex chronic disease, inpatient admission rates. And co-morbidity diagnosis that are occurring within that target population and outcomes of evidence based treatment currently available for this target population.

Scenario Follow-up

What other population-specific assessment data would be most helpful to better understand the health of Maria's target population?

Answer: Assessment data regarding the incidence and types of chronic disease and co-morbidities present within the population and prevalent health-related behaviors.

Correct answer.

While all the data provides assessment data, findings regarding the trends in chronic disease, co-morbidities, and health-related behaviors provide the most useful information to better understand the health of the target population.

**Summary**

Thorough assessment is a cornerstone for effective practice, whether the recipient of care is an individual, family, or group. One of the first steps in a population health assessment is thorough appraisal of the people who comprise the population. Understanding the history, demographics, vital statistics, values, and beliefs of people who make up the population offers important insight to health at the aggregate level. In addition to broad assessment data, setting-specific and population-specific assessments incorporate expanded assessment data, often provided through the use of information management systems.