

**No Forwarding Address: Emergency Care of the Homeless**  
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Behavioral Objectives/Outline

The RN will list economic, epidemiological and societal trends that may precipitate homelessness, both rural and urban.

Homeless: a growing problem

- a. Trends in homelessness; who, why, and where (2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress)
- b. National and state estimates of homeless people

The RN will demonstrate commitment to empathetic and dignified care that promotes constructive nurse-patient relationships.

Emergency Department: "Send me your poor, your huddled masses..."

- a. Attitudes and biases of health care professionals
- b. Realities and Surprises: who is homeless?  
How do I know?
- c. Triage techniques to identify homeless patients
- d. "There but for the grace of God go I...":  
empathetic, respectful care

The RN will identify common health challenges associated with homelessness and appropriate nursing interventions.

Health Care Challenges

- a. Integumentary / Hygiene
  1. Fungal infections: "Are you eating Fritos or are those your feet?"
  2. Insect infestations and bites
  3. Abscesses, rashes and infections
  4. "OOOOOH, what's that smell?":  
Using your Nose
  5. Dental hygiene and/or the "tooth to tattoo ratio"
- b. Nutrition and Substance Abuse
  1. Malnutrition: It Ain't Pretty
  2. Chemistry lab values: Where's the Albumin?

3. Correlation between substance abuse and malnutrition
4. Commonly abused substances and a few surprises...
5. Interventions and opportunities

c. Mental Health issues

1. The prevalence of mental illness among the homeless
2. Inadequate response – a national and state tragedy
3. Safety first: constructive, respectful interaction
4. “Yeah, we know him. And we don’t have room...” the challenge of transfers and acceptance.

d. Preventative Care Challenges

1. Access to health education
2. Facilitating screening
3. Promoting health vs. Putting out fires
4. “We are not the short term solution to your long term problem...”: avoiding inactivity and hopelessness

The RN will recognize the need to have a comprehensive resource-based program to respond to the safety and health needs of homeless patients

Creating Solutions

- a. Community resource assessment
- b. Case management and social work in the ED
- c. Making a plan / consistent response
- e. No one will take him – what now?