Nurses Demonstrating Innovation in Promoting Vaccination
In Schools and Online Earn ANA’s Immunity Award

SILVER SPRING, MD – One registered nurse takes her message about the importance of immunization directly to parents of low-income and immigrant students at urban elementary schools. Another registered nurse takes to social media outlets to dispel misperceptions about vaccinations and encourage immunization. Both Ann Andreoni and Melody Butler earned the American Nurses Association’s (ANA) Immunity Award for their initiatives to raise immunization rates and educate the public about the benefits of protection against vaccine-preventable diseases.

The national award is part of the Bringing Immunity to Every Community project, a partnership between ANA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to maximize nurses’ role in increasing vaccination rates and reducing incidence of diseases. The project seeks to increase nurses’ knowledge and competency in immunization, encourage nurses to be vaccinated, and position nurses as leading advocates for immunization. ANA and CDC promote vaccination programs as among the most effective and cost-efficient ways to prevent disease and death, and to protect entire communities from the spread of infectious diseases.

Andreoni, DNP, RN, PNP-BC, a pediatric nurse practitioner and faculty member at the Loyola University Chicago School of Nursing, has served as a role model for nursing students by demonstrating how advocacy and planning can result in a successful community intervention. While working in her clinical practice at a health center based at a high school just outside Chicago, Andreoni recognized that many children did not have a regular primary care provider or health insurance. She designed, implemented, and evaluated a pilot program to provide a free seasonal influenza vaccine to children and a low-cost vaccine for staff in three elementary schools in communities near the high school.
With assistance from school-based health clerks, Andreoni and her nursing students met with parents during parent-teacher conferences and arranged individual meetings with parents to help them learn about the immunization program, answer questions and concerns about the safety of vaccinations, and seek written consent for their children to be immunized. Educational materials were developed in English and Spanish. More than 350 students received the seasonal influenza vaccination in school as a result of the team-based approach to communications, education, and vaccine administration.

Andreoni’s evaluation of the pilot program determined that the most effective way to secure parental permission for in-school immunization programs is to combine a nurse immunization champion’s direct interaction with parents with educational materials that are culturally sensitive and use appropriate language for the target audience.

Butler, BSN, RN, a pediatric nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center in West Islip, N.Y., educates parents of her patients about vaccinations and seeks to ensure that each patient is up to date on them. She is designing a workshop for her pediatric unit colleagues on vaccination issues. She does even more to promote immunization and counter immunization myths outside the hospital.

Butler created a Facebook page entitled, “Nurses Who Vaccinate,” in response to a pre-existing page, “Nurses Who Don’t Vaccinate,” to provide visitors current evidence-based information on immunization and its benefits. She also participates in several other online activities that encourage immunization, including Every Child by Two’s “Vaccinate Your Baby” online promotion. She often responds to online parenting forums that present misinformation about vaccines. Her Internet information initiatives attracted the attention of The Wall Street Journal, which quoted her in a story about protecting infant children from pertussis, or whooping cough, a highly contagious bacterial infection of the upper respiratory system.

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