To: Nursing faculty and students

From: Council on Nursing Education in Washington State (CNEWS) & Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA)

Re: Ebola

Date: October 17, 2014

The 2014 Ebola outbreak is the largest in history. Officially, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 8,914 Ebola cases total in the entire months-long outbreak; it has also said that the total is under-reported. The mortality rate in this outbreak is about 70%. The WHO estimates that there will be 5,000 to 10,000 new Ebola cases weekly in West Africa by the first week of December.

The recent news that two registered nurses in Dallas have become the first people to contract the Ebola virus in the U.S. underscores the serious ramifications for nurses and health care workers caring for Ebola patients. A top priority for CNEWS and WSNA is the safety of our patients, our health care workers, our nursing students, our faculty, and our community.

The situation is evolving by the minute, and WSNA is monitoring and actively addressing the safety needs of our nurses, nursing students, nursing faculty, and patients. For the latest information, please check out http://www.wsna.org/topics/ebola/.

In response to the growing questions and concerns from the nursing education community, we have put together the following FAQs that we hope you find helpful.

**Q: Am I in danger of catching Ebola in the learning environment, in the clinical setting, or during my clinical experience?**

**A:** Ebola is spread through direct contact with blood and body fluids. It is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or through your eyes, nose, or mouth) with blood and body fluids (like sweat, urine, feces, saliva, and vomit) and objects (like needles) that have been contaminated with blood or fluids of a person sick with Ebola. Ebola is not spread through air, water, or food.

A person infected with Ebola cannot spread the disease until symptoms appear. The average time from exposure to when signs or symptoms appear is 8 to 10 days (incubation period is 2 to 21 days). Signs include fever (higher than 101.5 F; low grade fever of 99.0 F should be investigated) and symptoms like severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, or unexplained bleeding or bruising.

Q: How do I protect myself against Ebola as a member of the public?

A: There is no FDA-approved vaccine available for Ebola. To best protect yourself from Ebola:

- DO wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do NOT touch the blood or body fluids (like urine, feces, saliva, vomit, sweat, and semen) of people who are sick.
- Do NOT handle items that may have come in contact with a sick person’s blood or body fluids, like clothes, bedding, needles, or medical equipment.
- Do NOT touch the body of someone who has died of Ebola.
- When in doubt, contact your infection control officer or local health department.


Q: Should nursing students be caring for Ebola patients?

A: We recommend that nursing students engaged in student learning clinical activities restrict their contact with highly suspected or confirmed Ebola. We recommend that only highly-trained and experienced response team members engage in care. Those who have not been through extensive personal protective equipment (PPE) training and patient management should NOT care for potential or actual patients with Ebola. We recommend strict adherence to universal precautions in the care of all patients.

Q: What happens if I am a student and come in contact with a potential Ebola patient?

A: Immediately engage with your preceptor, the charge nurse, or your instructor so that they can alert trained personnel to begin screening. Follow your agency and school policies and procedures regarding exposure. Based on best practice and current information, we discourage any student or untrained personnel from patient contact. Minimal patient contact is essential while assessment is underway and while appropriate departments, including infection control and the state health department, are notified upon laboratory confirmation that the patient is positive for Ebola or highly suspected of if laboratory results are pending, but the travel history is from an endemic area.

Q: What are best practices for personal protective equipment (PPE)?

A: Education and training in the proper use of PPE by health care workers while caring for Ebola patients is critical to prevent exposure and transmission of Ebola. Refer to agency policies and procedures and best practices. We recommend that nursing students engaged in student learning clinical activities restrict their contact with highly suspected or confirmed Ebola. We also highly recommend that only highly-trained and experienced response team members engage in care. Those who have not been through
extensive PPE training and patient management should NOT care for potential or actual patients with Ebola.

Link to Ebola training video for health care workers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9sOT4EH66c

Q: What is the travel advisory to Africa and implications for nursing students?

A: CDC urges all US residents to avoid nonessential travel to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone because of unprecedented outbreaks of Ebola in those countries. CDC recommends that travelers to these countries protect themselves by avoiding contact with the blood and body fluids of people who are sick with Ebola or Ebola-like symptoms.


Please be aware that if you are quarantined upon entry back into the US with any symptoms, it may significantly impact your ability to complete your coursework and fulfill graduation requirements. The 21-day quarantine would be applied to ensure that the student would have no symptoms before returning to school.

Q: Where should I go to find the most reliable and valid current information?

A: Because this situation is evolving quickly, it is critical that you consult reliable and valid information. Please go to the following websites:

- Washington State Nurses Association www.wsna.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov
- Washington State Department of Health (DOH) www.doh.wa.gov