

Tracks: Nurses and the Tracking Network

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Desiree Robinson] Hello and welcome to the Tracks podcast series where we explore topics related to CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.

Today, we're talking about how nurses can use the Tracking Network to improve their practice. Joining us by phone are Amy Garcia, Chief Nursing Officer for the American Nurses Association, and Kitty Mahoney, President of the Massachusetts Association of Public Health Nurses and Chief Public Health Nurse for the town of Framingham. Thank you both for joining us.

Amy, the American Nurses Association is a valuable and respected resource for nurses. Now, why is ANA interested in the Tracking Network?

[Amy Garcia] ANA supports the Tracking Network because it's a useful tool for nurses in all areas of practice. You know that nurses are a trusted source of information for patients and coworkers. And, having access to data and information on the Tracking Network provides nurses with an invaluable resource to correlate specific environmental health exposures to observed health effects.

[Desiree Robinson] Tell us how nurses might use the Tracking Network.

[Amy Garcia] For one, school nurses could use the information on the Network to identify issues, such as asthma or childhood lead poisoning, in their region. This would allow them to develop parent education materials on these topics. Public health nurses can use the data to answer questions from the community about environmental health concerns, such as heavy metals in the drinking water or cancer clusters. The Network can provide hot topics and current data for nursing students, grant seekers, and nurse researchers. Another use would be to gather data to inform decisions about policies, practice, and legislation.

[Desiree Robinson] Thanks, Amy. Now let's hear from Kitty. I understand, Kitty, that you have used the Tracking Network on your job. Tell us your experience.

[Kitty Mahoney] I'd be glad to. In Massachusetts, Middlesex County is experiencing an increase in low birth weight babies each year and we thought there might be an environmental issue contributing to the problem. Drinking water contamination was one suspect. So we used the Tracking Network to count the number of low birth weight babies over time and compared those numbers to water quality data on contaminants, such as arsenic, or disinfectant by-products—the DBPs—and nitrates. Without the Tracking Network it would have taken us weeks to complete a data analysis such as this. But, the data was easily accessible on the Network, we were able to complete this in days and found that there was actually no relationship between birth weight and drinking water quality, so we could continue investigating other potential causes.

We've also used the Tracking Network to look at skin cancer rates over the past few years. The data has helped us develop public health interventions, like skin cancer screening days, and sunscreen distribution, sun safe behaviors, public health education. We're going to monitor skin cancer rates over time to see if these interventions have actually had any impact. We're also looking at future applications for the Tracking Network in areas like childhood lead poisoning and asthma. The Network is a powerful tool for nurses and it has certainly made my job easier.

[Desiree Robinson] Thank you, Kitty. Those are great examples of how nurses can use the Tracking Network in everyday practice.

I'd like to thank Amy and Kitty once more and encourage all of our listeners to learn more about the Tracking Network at www.cdc.gov/ephtracking.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.