

Preface



Ellen Olshansky, DNSc, WHNP-BC, FAAN
Guest Editor

As the first decade of the twenty-first century comes to a close, we are faced with many complicated challenges. These are embodied in several critical concerns: the environment, the economy, global relationships, and many others. Health and health care continue to be front and center as major issues of concern. And women's health, in particular, continues to have many unanswered, albeit, important questions. In reality, we can't separate women's health from health in general and we can't separate health from other societal concerns, such as the environment, the economy, and our national and international relationships. All of these aspects comprise the various social determinants of health. We need to understand health within a larger social/economic/cultural context, a context that contains myriad variables that directly affect health. Clearly, women's health overlaps with health in general. Despite this overlap, women's health does contain unique aspects and does deserve special focus. Nurses have carved out an important specialty in women's health. Nurses comprise a significant proportion of health care providers who care for women. In this special issue on women's health, we have strived to present a sample of women's health concerns and to address clinical implications and recommendations based on the current evidence and knowledge available. The intent is to provide the most up-to-date information for nurses who care for women.

The history of nursing and women's health is presented by Kass-Wolff and Lowe. This article includes a historical timeline that emphasizes how the role of the women's health nurse practitioner was developed and continues to develop as an important health care provider for women. This historical perspective lays the foundation for understanding women's health nursing today.

Women suffer from many chronic conditions, such as arthritis, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer now considered chronic conditions because of the long-term survival rates for many cancers. This special issue contains information related to promotion of cardiovascular health in an article written by Warzinski,

Tuite, and Burke. Another article on implications of having a genetic risk for breast cancer is presented by Hamilton. With our increasing scientific knowledge, significant breakthroughs have been achieved in our understanding of genetic predisposition to certain diseases. Such understanding leads to a need to understand the human responses to knowing about one's own genetic risk factors. Ovarian cancer is addressed by Dumrongpakapakorn, Hopkins, Sherwood, Zora, and Donovan, with a focus on the use of computer technology to assist women with ovarian cancer in managing their diagnosis. This article addresses the use of new technology as related to nursing care of women with a complicated life-threatening diagnosis.

A serious health concern falls under the category of sexually transmitted infections. Human papillomavirus is one sexually transmitted infection that has been implicated in cervical cancer. Recently a vaccination to prevent human papillomavirus became available. The evidence to support the efficacy of this vaccine and clinical guidelines for using it are presented by Knudtson, Tiso, and Phillips.

The criminal justice system and its approach to women's health is highlighted in this issue by Fisher and Hatton, who recognize that jails and prisons are the context in which some women live and experience health conditions. Women's health in the criminal justice system poses unique challenges for nursing care. Mental health of women across the lifespan is discussed by Zender and Olshansky, with a particular focus on anxiety and depression.

Reproductive health concerns continue to be a high priority as we address comprehensive women's health and health care. Reproductive health is addressed by Levi, Simmonds, and Taylor, with a focus on the importance of nurses taking an active role in the clinical arena by applying a public health framework.

With our increasingly global context, the health of women must be understood from a global perspective. Berg and Woods address global health of women with a focus on women as caregivers.

With the rising incidence of chronic health conditions in this era of health care reform, it has become ever more important to promote health and prevent those conditions that are preventable. Zender and Olshansky summarize the current state of knowledge related to promoting wellness in women across the lifespan.

Taken together, this compendium of articles is an overview of many, though of course not all, of the contemporary issues related to the health and health care of women, including nurses as key health care providers for women. These articles are intended to capture the current state of the science in these particular areas, to encourage nurses who care for women to continue to seek out ongoing scientific knowledge, to raise questions, and to continually develop effective and high-quality evidence-based practice as they care for women and families.

Ellen Olshansky, DNSc, WHNP-BC, FAAN
Program in Nursing Science
College of Health Sciences
University of California
233 Irvine Hall
Irvine, CA 92697, USA

E-mail address:
e.olshansky@uci.edu (E. Olshansky)