**WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?**

A community is a group of people (a large or small group) living in a certain geographical area and working together for a common goal. They share the same resources such as water, climatic and geographic conditions, health services, administration and leadership, as well   
as disadvantages such as shortages, risks   
and dangers.

The community is made up of individual persons and each of these individuals belongs to a family all of whom are a part of the larger community.

**Individual**

Each individual you know is different and unique. Each has a mixture of characteristics, some of which they share with others and some of which are part of a particular culture. Culture is all those things which people learn, share and pass on to later generations. One of the most important of these things is language, for it is the means by which people communicate with one another.

As a health worker you must be able to communicate with individuals in the community where you work and acquire some knowledge of the language they speak. It is important to be able to show respect and understanding for other people and their culture as well as knowing their local practices like greetings.

Individuals learn beliefs and customs about right and wrong behaviour as they grow up. For example, in some areas, young people are taught that dead ancestors can influence the lives of living people. If the ancestors become angry they can cause disease and misfortune. Therefore, when you teach such individuals about the effects of germs on their health status, they may not be convinced and may opt to follow their traditional beliefs.

Sometimes, people follow both sets of ideas – traditional and modern, whereby they consult the dispensary for treatment of the symptoms and return to the traditional healer to get rid of what they think is the ‘real’ cause of the illness. As a community health worker you need to understand human behaviour and the factors that influence their behaviour in order to be effective in your community health activities.

An individual can only attain full health if they have wholesome growth. The place where this wholesome growth can best be cultivated is the family.

**The Family**

The family is the smallest recognised group of individuals in a community. It begins with a marriage union in which husbands and wives have certain rights and obligations. It is one of the oldest institutions that mankind has known. It defies time, boundaries, cultures and human understanding.   
It is therefore not surprising that scholars from all over the world who have studied the family of mankind do not agree on one single definition of the family. Rather than look at every available definition of the family, you will consider one which tends to agree on many aspects of the family.

The family is a group of two or more persons, who share emotional bonds and material things, usually live in the same household, are related by blood, marriage or adoption, and sexual relationship is socially approved for the parents.

The family is a very important social group in community health.   
The family provides love, security and a sense of belonging for individuals from the time they are born. Many of a person’s characteristics are influenced by their family. For example, a child learns from their family what behaviour is acceptable in the community and the language its parents speak. Families have a strong influence on what each member does.

Often there is an important figure in the family who makes the decisions or whose opinions are highly valued. The opinion of people in the family may be more important to a person than the opinion of a health worker. This has important effects on health behaviour and the use of health services. For example, in some communities women may not be free to go to or take their children to a health centre, even if they want to, because their husbands do not allow them. These are important things to remember when you advise individuals about a health problem.

**Types of Families**

There are different types of families in a community

**The Nuclear Family**

This consists of a husband and a wife with or without children. This type of family brings forth children (family of procreation). Children born in this family consider it to be the family of their origin.

**The Extended Family**

This is also called a joint extended family. This family includes members of nuclear families and other relatives, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and grandparents.

**Single Parent Family**

This is formed when one parent brings up children alone either because of divorce, separation, death or desertion of their spouse.

**The Blended Family**

This type of family is formed when husband and wife bring into the new marriage unrelated children from their previous marriages. Cohabitation and homosexual marriages are also referred to as blended families.

**Functions of the Family**

The family has many important functions,   
these include:

* Bringing about a sense of togetherness and a balance between individual and shared (mutual) action by each family member; nurturance and trust; stability and integrity of the group; interdependence and the ability to meet demands for survival and development
* Socialising its members into the   
  larger community
* Teaching respect for individual members and their property.   
  This includes respect for differences among the family members and others
* Teaching tolerance, fairness and a sense of right or wrong among its members and others
* Caring for its members and developing a sense of trust between and among its members
* Providing an environment for learning and internalising individual and gender roles and  Inducing its members to its religious faith and teaching respect and tolerance for religious differences
* Sharing leisure and recreation together
* Seeking external help from the community for itself and its members
* Providing security and refuge for its members in times of need
* Providing a socially sanctioned environment for sexual expression amongst married adults
* Seeking health care for its sick members and providing nursing care for its sick, disabled or dependent members
* Maintaining a healthy home environment conducive to the development of its membersresponsibilities

**Factors Affecting Family Health**

**Internal Factors**

The internal factors that influence the health of the  
family include:

* Family size
* Structure
* Type, members
* Relationship
* Biological characteristics and values

**External Factors**

The external factors which influence the health of a  
family include:

* Family locality
* Terrain
* Climate
* Water supply
* Air
* Biological environment (insects, rodents, etc.)
* Housing and residence

**Functions of a Community**

Having seen the different components that make up a community, now look at the functions of the community.

The functions of a community include:

* Transmitting and sharing information, ideas and beliefs
* Educating its children about their culture (socialising) and welcoming newcomers into the group’s culture (acculturation)
* Producing and distributing services and goods
* Providing companionship and support to individual members and smaller groups
* Sharing and utilising space for living, schools, health facilities, fields, roads etc.
* Protecting individual and group rights and welfare

From the previous page, you can see that a community functions as a medium for the growth and development of its individual members. It imposes the standards by which the individuals are evaluated, if the community has high expectations of its members, their performance also tends to be high. A good community is judged by the kind of people it produces.

**Characteristics of a healthy community**

* Safe and healthy environment free from hazards
* High standard of personal hygiene
* Adequate supply of water
* Adequate and nutritious food
* Suitable housing
* Good and harmonious interpersonal relationship
* Available and accessible health care facility
* Available and accessible educational, social and recreational facilities
* Gainfull occupational activities
* Sound communicational infrastructure
* Communal tackling of problems

Problems affecting the community

* Unsanity environment
* Overcrowding
* Poverty
* Unclean and inadequate water supply
* Lack of nutritious food
* Unsafe environment
* Epidemic and endemic diseases
* Illiteracy and ignorance
* Poor leadership and lack of participation
* Poor weather conditions
* Poor infrastructure
* Political instability

**Community Sub-systems**

1. **Socio-cultural System**

This system is made up of all the customs and beliefs, family and kinships, leadership and power structures in society. This sub-system exerts a powerful influence on the lifestyles of the community members, their priorities and their attitudes and values towards health and illness.

For example some cultural factors promote either acceptance or stigma towards a certain illness. High-risk behaviour may be a result of cultural traditions.

**2. Political System**

This sub-system is made up of the government and its development policies as well as political organisations.   
If there is political support towards improving health care delivery, the government provides the mechanism and structure for the planning, implementation and evaluation of the health care delivery system. The constitution of Kenya contains a declaration for the elimination of poverty, ignorance and disease; hence the establishment of the Ministry of Health and several other ministries.

**3. Economic System**

The government’s ability to provide health and other services to its citizens depends on the state of the economy. The poorer the economy of the country, the more disadvantaged its people will be. Low economic status is highly associated with malnutrition and communicable diseases.

**4. Education System**

Education is the main tool of changing behaviour and improving individual and community health.   
Low educational status perpetuates under-development, harmful traditions and superstitions.

The educational system can be effectively used to pass health related information and messages that could significantly transform the perception of the communities on healthy living and prevention of illnesses.

**5. Religious System**

The religious system may be a source of health promotion when its values and teachings positively influence lifestyles and healthy behaviour, for example, forbidding smoking, alcohol consumption, pre-marital and extra-marital sex.   
On the other hand, religious teachings may promote ill health, for example, by forbidding the followers from seeking treatment in hospitals.

**6. Environmental System**

Environmental sanitation is one of the leading promoters of individual and community health. Clean water supply, proper disposal of waste and adequate housing are key to community wellness. Environmental pollution is a cause of various illnesses.

**7. Communication and Transport System**

Communication includes all the means of contacting and exchanging information with one another such as roads, bridges, railroad, telephone, television, radio, computers, internet, fax, and postal services.

The communication system is important in spreading health messages. Transport aids in communication by moving people from place to place.

**8. Health Care system**

The health care system exists to provide promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, health centres, dispensaries, and through special health projects and programs.

The health care system is enhanced through linkages that bring together the government, non-governmental organisations, private institutions and individuals in providing continuous and comprehensive health services. These linkages strengthen the multi-sectoral approach of achieving health for all.

**Concept of Community Health**

*Community health is the science and art of promoting health and preventing diseases through organised community participation****.***

**Examples of community health activities**

* Health education, counseling and training of health workers
* Community health assessment and diagnosis
* Envinmental sanitation
* Supply of clean water
* Food hygiene and security
* Personal hygiene
* Vector and pest control
* Control of communicable diseases
* Prenatal services
* Family planning services
* CHW services
* School health services
* Home visiting and Home Bases Nursing
* Occupational nursing
* Care of disable, elderly, disadvantaged and chronically ill
* Intersectional collaboration

The term ‘community health’ is also referred to as:

* Population medicine
* Social medicine
* Community medicine
* Preventive medicine

**Aims of Community Health**

Community health aims to achieve the following:

* Improved sanitation in the environment
* Prioritisation of the community’s needs
* Control of communicable diseases
* Health education to promote healthy behaviour and practices
* Early diagnosis and prevention of disease
* Disease surveillance
* Case/contact tracing and treatment
* Empowerment of all individuals to realise their rights and responsibilities for the attainment of good health for all

The main goals of community health are to:

* Identify community health problems and needs
* Plan ways of meeting community health needs
* Implement activities geared towards meeting the community health needs
* Evaluate the impact of community health services/activities

**Aims of Community Health**

A successful community health programme is one in which the community and health care providers collaborate to achieve the following benefits:

* Increased life expectancy (life span) of every individual
* Decreased mortality rates particularly of mothers and children
* Decreased morbidity rates from all causes
* An increase in the total well being (physical, mental and social) of every individual
* An increase in the quality of life for all people
* Overall social and economic development of the population
* Equitable distribution of resources

**What examples of community health activities**

**Concept of Family Health Care**

Family health care is a holistic approach to the achievement of wholesome health for the family.

**Aims of Family Health Care**

* Identifying and appraising health problems of the family
* Providing health education for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases
* Sharing health information with the family to enable members to understand and accept health problems
* Providing community health nursing services according to the needs of the family
* Helping the family to develop competence at assessing their health problems and at carrying out remedial health action through health education, instructions and demonstrations
* Contributing needed materials for personal and social development of family members
* Helping and encouraging the family members to utilise available resources to maintain all aspects of the health of the family

**Principles and Process of Family Health Care**

In order for you to work successfully with a family and achieve your goals of promoting health and preventing disease, you must observe the following principles:

* Establish a good working relationship with the family
* Plan relevant health education and sharing of clear health messages, which will guide them on how to take care   
  of themselves
* Gather relevant information about the family which will enable them to identify health problems and set priorities
* Provide need-based support and services to the family regardless of sex, age, income, and religion, in order to improve their health status
* Work in collaboration with other health service agencies to avoid duplicating family health care

**Principles and Process of Family Health Care**

* To succeed in your family health care activities, following these principles alone is not enough. You also need to employ the nursing process approach in the care of families.

**Step 1: Assessment**

* You need to assess the family so as to identify (diagnose) the family health problems, needs and resources.   
  This involves collecting data using interviews, observation, communication, subjective appraisal, and reviewing available records and reports.

**Step 2: Planning**

* This involves planning for health action by choosing effective and affordable alternatives and setting priorities after considering the available internal and external resources. You should work hand-in-hand with the family members at all stages of planning.

**Step 3: Implementation**

* You should implement the interventions or health actions agreed with the family members. Implementing also includes increasing the family’s ability to function effectively and removing barriers to health care as well as assisting the family to do those things which they cannot do by themselves.

**Step 4: Evaluation**

* This involves evaluating or measuring whether the expected outcome has been achieved. If no achievements have been made, find out what factors interfered and change your approach accordingly.

**Home Visiting**

Assessment is the first step in the process approach to family health care, but when do you carry out this assessment?   
You could assess family members when they visit your health facility. However, in order to get a comprehensive picture of a family’s health, you need to visit them at home. Home visits are an important part of your work as a community health nurse as they allow you to see families and their needs in their own homes.

Home visiting is one of the essential community health services that you should provide. It has two main purposes:

* It allows you to follow up individual families at home to find out why some health problems persist in the community despite efforts to prevent or control them, for example malnutrition, communicable diseases, or repeated failure to attend clinics, especially if the family is at risk
* It keeps you aware of what is going on in your   
  catchment area

In order for you to conduct home visiting successfully, you need to have the following skills:

* Good technical skills and knowledge of preventive and therapeutic measures
* Good communication skills and   
  teaching ability
* Good leadership skills and rational thinking to make sound judgments
* Good counselling skills and an understanding of human relations

During home visits you act on your own, making decisions on the spot and carrying them out.   
You need to be prepared. When planning and implementing home visits, you should be guided by some basic principles in order to make a success of it.

**Principles of a home visiting**

* Planned and benefit to the patient
* Purposeful, clear and meet patient needs
* Regular, flexible and according to patient needs
* Educative to patient
* Used to demonstrate principle of health
* Convenience and acceptable to patient
* Respect the patient rights
* Recorded in case file

**The Process of Home Visiting**

The process of home visiting is carried out in five phases.

**Entry or Initiation Phase**

The community health nurse shares information with the patient on the reason and purposes for home visits.   
This interaction may occur in a hospital ward or at a clinic.

**Pre-visit Activities**

Before the actual home visit, you have to look for information regarding the patient and the family. You also need to gather information regarding the location of the house, distance from your health facility and the physical address. During pre-visit activities, you should investigate the community resources, assemble supplies and prepare for the first contact with the patient at their doorstep.

**Activities During Home Visiting**

This is the working phase during which you put into action your planned health activities. During this phase you must establish trust and rapport with the patient and the family so that there can be a positive interpersonal relationship   
(a professional nurse-patient relationship). This relationship will enhance the achievement of the mutually determined health-oriented goals.

**Termination Phase of Visit**

This occurs when the health oriented goals have been met. Termination of home visits can occur due to any of the following reasons:

* The patients’ health has been restored and the patient can function without the nurse
* The patient has changed their residence
* The community health nurse has transferred the patients’ care to another nurse or agency

**Post-visit Activities**

* Post-visit activities include recording and reporting important events of the home visits, and sharing the reports with the appropriate authorities and individuals about the patient family.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Home Visiting**

* There are many good nursing reasons (advantages) for carrying out home visiting. Though the activity does have its disadvantages, they are quite insignificant compared to its advantages. You should therefore try to overcome them through careful planning so that they do not prevent you from carrying out this important activity.

Advantages of home visiting

* Accurate assessment of family
* Observe physical environment
* Identify barriers to community health
* Use realistic resources
* Active participation
* Implement planned care
* Learn about the home and family state
* Give health massage to the family
* Good image of the nurse
* Clarify doubt and misconception
* Observe and appreciate family practice

Disadvantages of a home visit

* Time consuming
* Expensive
* Energy consuming
* Unforeseen events can occur
* Rejection by the family
* Confusion of the nurse role

**Principles of Community Health**

Before you explore the principles of community health, first look at the definition of the word ‘principle’. A principle can be defined as

**A** basic belief, theory, or rule that has a major influence on the way in which something is done. - Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002)

Principles are the basic ideas of conduct or rules of action.   
They provide the community health nurse with a clear and rational framework to guide their work.

**Principles of community health by Alma Ala declaration 1978**

* Availability of health care for all
* Affordability of health care
* Promoteve and preventive aspect of health care
* Integrate curative and preventive
* Active participation of individual
* Utilize the available resources in the community
* Inter-secterial approach

So far you have looked at the principles of community health.   
Now look at the principles of community health nursing.

* Community health nursing services should be available to all, according to their health needs regardless of sex, age, culture, religion, social or economic status, race, political affiliation, ethnicity or nationality.
* A community health nursing programme must have clearly defined objectives and purposes for its services.
* Community health nursing should not be a vertical programme. A community health nurse must work with other stakeholders in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the community health programme.
* Community health nursing should involve the community right through the planning implementation and evaluation of the programme.
* The community health service should build the capacity of the community to run their own health programme for the purpose of sustainability. These include training of the Communities Own Resource Persons (CORPs).
* Health education and counselling for the individual, family and community are integral parts of community health nursing.
* Community health nursing services should be based on the identified needs of the patient and there should be continuity of services to the patient.
* Community health nursing should work within the community’s culture and norms without compromising professionalism.
* Community health nursing is a service and there should therefore be no room to demand favours, gifts or bribes from clients.
* Community health nursing is dynamic and the nurses should therefore actively participate in continuing professional development so as to keep abreast with new developments.
* Community health nursing services should develop proper guidelines and maintain proper records and reports.

**The Roles and Functions of a Community Health Nurse**

As a nurse, you have achieved the right to perform your duties through merit (formal training). You are trained to play a certain part as a member of a health team which is bound by the legal and moral expectations of your profession. This is what you call your role.   
In your role as a nurse, you have developed ideas about what is appropriate to say or do within this role. The role of the community health nurse is to prevent illness and maximise the health of individuals in the community.

Your function, on the other hand, refers to the job that you are expected to perform as a nurse. That is, the broad areas of responsibility which you assume as a nurse. Your functions as a nurse may vary according to your training, experience, and designation. The functions of a community health nurse are many and emanate from your role.

Roles and functions of a community health nurse

* Implementer
* Advocate
* Advisor
* Health educator
* Assessor and identifier
* Planner
* Evaluator
* Researcher
* Trainer