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The Environment and Your Health

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Publishers and readers are invited to send material, ideas, and comments for this column to Bill Johnson, Managing Editor, Electronic Green Journal, Arizona State University East, Library Services, 7001 E. Williams Field Road, Mesa, AZ 85212, USA. TEL: 480-727-1160.

It is no secret that healthy natural environments contribute to healthy human lives. The extent to which nature impacts human health is an active area of research and interest in the arena of holistic medicine. In addition to improving human health, this research may also serve to advance the cause of environmental conservation. For example, organically grown food or biological control of pests may help to reduce the level of persistent pesticides in our soil and water. Horticultural therapy may serve to improve urban outdoor environments as well as the personal lives of today's city gardeners, replacing concrete with carnations or asphalt with asparagus.

This intersection between complimentary or integrative medicine and environmental science is the subject of this new column entitled **The Environment and Your Health**.

Since it is new, we are charting some unknown territory. The collection of resources that I propose includes scholarly journals and key journal articles that have been highly cited; important books; human resources in academic institutions, government agencies, and professional associations; plus related Web sites. You are more than welcome to suggest items for this ongoing resource directory or to discuss news, research, or other items related to the topic. Historical development or futuristic forecasts of how nature and medicine have been or will be interconnected are particularly interesting. Specific examples or case studies may also shed light on this interrelationship. Another area of interest may be associated with the classification schedule and subject headings used by the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine to organize information in this rapidly evolving field. This would

undoubtedly assist many in their quest for health related information.

Numerous individuals have contributed to our understanding of the power of nature to heal. Few however, have contributed as much as Florence Nightingale. She recognized the interplay between the environment and human health in the unsanitary conditions of the Crimean War and in the polluted aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in Victorian England. Her insight and work throughout the 19th Century formed the theoretical basis of modern nursing, an environmental adaptation theory. In fact, environment is the core concept in Nightingale's model of nursing. (1) Her definition of health, as presented to the 1893 Chicago Exposition sheds additional light on this aspect of nursing theory.

"Health is not only to be well, but to be able to use well every power we have...Both kinds of nursing [nursing proper and health nursing] are to put us in the best possible condition for nature to restore or to preserve health - to prevent or to cure disease or injury..."(2)

Whether in the "micro-environment" at a patient's bedside or in the "macro-environment" of an urban garden, the intersection between the environment and human health is worth our attention. While many of these concepts have been in use by some in the medical community for years, their application to environmental conservation is more contemporary, even futuristic. This intersection between medicine and environmental studies could be more significant than anyone realizes as the dawn of a new millennium approaches and the need for a stronger commitment to environmental conservation is more pressing than ever.

References

1. Selanders, Louise C. 1993. Florence Nightingale: An Environmental Adaptation Theory. Notes on Nursing 9. London, Sage Publications, page 17.
2. Ibid., page 30.

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