Abstract for a workshop at the EFPC Barcelona 2023 conference:

Community Nurses – Can they make a difference in public health emergency?

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Presenter: Anita Sackl is a health expert at the Austrian National Public Health Institute, department “Long-term Care”. She worked in various areas of the Austrian health care system and for more than 10 years as Public Health Expert and Food Security Specialist in humanitarian emergency aid with Doctors without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Purpose: Community Nurses are an important public health workforce defined by their tasks and relationships with citizens. In a context of climate change their position is even essential within regional contexts of public health emergencies, disaster management and resilience building. Participants are invited to this workshop to debate, to analyse and weigh arguments to collaboratively review the position of Community Nurses (a community-based care service) in the context of public health emergencies and disasters.

Context: The climate change is already affecting Austria in various forms. Depending on the region the impacts, risks and vulnerabilities vary. Whilst it does lead to flooding, biodiversity loss, higher temperatures, decreasing crop yields and water constrains, it does also affect people’s health. In several Austrian provinces community nurses manage the interface between the social and health sector in multidisciplinary teams, thereby increasing and facilitating the access to services. They are active in urban and regional settings and to face actual and future public health emergencies or disasters. Community nurses play an important role in community settings and future crisis teams, and in the continuum of disaster management (preparedness, mitigation, response, ...).

State of the art: Across the broad spectrum of community settings and through all phases of natural or man-made disaster or during infectious disease outbreaks nurses play a central role in response before, during and after a disaster in international humanitarian aid. How can that expertise be adapted for a European setting such as Austria? Does the current approach limit our response? What are the experiences in other countries, especially regarding implementation pitfalls and challenges?