November 6, 2020

Dear Award Committee Members,

Thank you for considering our submission for the Dr. Ann E. Nolte Writing Award. We are pleased to present to you our rationale for nomination.

Unlike epidemiologists and health care workers, health educators are not the face of the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to threaten the lives of millions across the globe.  We are forever thankful for those fighting on the front lines, but while this is happening, health educators are the pillars holding up the infrastructure of public and community health efforts.

Through our publication titled “Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Professional Roles and Responsibilities of Heath Educators,” we found that health educators have shifted their work priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many are currently facing the disease head-on. Additionally, many health educators continue to manage their primary work priorities and responsibilities while simultaneously battling the challenges of the pandemic as a health education professional.  Most importantly, we learned that health educators were prepared to make this shift in priority, as they are prepared in a way that allows the transfer of skills from one focus area to another--including to a focus area that is unlike any we have seen in our lifetimes. Not only did most health educators report an acceptance of this priority shift, most reported feeling prepared to handle the sudden shift in responsibility.  This is a significant finding for the preparation of future health education and promotion professionals.

As stated by the editor, this manuscript will make a substantive contribution to the field. We hope so and plan to continue studying the health education and promotion profession. We find that the responsibilities, work expectations, and skill set of health educators, as well as the field in general, are drastically under-investigated. The work of health educators is critical to the well-being of society, especially in times of political and social unrest when public health is being undermined and falsehoods easily spread.

There will likely be more morbidity due to COVID-19 and from unattended chronic diseases that are heightened by the gaps in care it is causing. Many of our “normal” work roles focus on chronic disease prevention and treatment, such as diabetes and healthy behaviors. Now, health educators are working in duality-not only helping those with chronic disease become and stay healthy, but also working against the added disease burden effects of COVID-19. Therefore, the need for a trained competent health education workforce is greater now than ever in the past**.** Health educators should be empowered to recognize the significant roles they are playing during this pandemic. This also stresses the need to continue to investigate the health education workforce. There will be no returning to pre-COVID-19 normal routines, only moving forward with the lasting effects that the disease has left on public and community health educators.