PURPOSE: To identify gaps in knowledge regarding healthcare for young mothers in a Jamaican residential home with the intention of informing future educational materials targeted to the needs of this vulnerable population.

METHODS: Nursing students, as part of a service learning project, traveled to Jamaica to provide health instruction to young mothers in a residential home designed for young mothers. The young mothers participated in focus groups designed to determine gaps in knowledge of general and sexual health in this marginalized group of young mothers. To be eligible to participate in the focus groups, the young women needed to be residents of the setting, aged 12-17 and either pregnant and/or parenting. A total of 13 teenage mothers participated, all of whom were either currently in school or planning to attend once their child was old enough. Data were then analyzed for content with frequency of responses used to construct themes.

SIGNIFICANCE: Adolescent health, including sexual health and pregnancy, are topics of concern for healthcare providers, family members, communities and teens around the world. Particularly in Jamaica, teens are at risk with one-third of females and half of males aged 15-19 years of age being sexually active (Ishida, StuP & McDonald, 2011). With only 49 per cent of females reporting condom use at last intercourse and 48 per cent reporting condom use with each encounter with a non-steady partner, the reproductive health of these young adults is in grave danger, indicates a need for further intervention. (Serbanescue, Ruize & Suchdev, 2010; JNFB, 2008).

RESULTS:  

- Personal Meanings of Health  
  - When someone is healthy you, “have lots of energy for the whole day.”  
  - “If your body’s healthy, it will be able to fight bacteria and diseases that make you sick.”  
  - Goal setting, “tells you what to do. Every morning, you can think about what you can do” to accomplish them  
  - Interest by young mothers in eating healthier, drinking water, using supplements, exercising and sufficient rest  

- Considerations in Health Decision-Making  
  - Identification of unique decisions, such as breastfeeding  
  - “Some people don’t want to do it, but you have to do it because it is the best thing for my baby.”  
  - Provides better health for baby and mom  
  - Factors influencing decisions  
  - Computer use for access to health information  
  - House mothers and other advocates who, “come and talk to us” help to give lessons on health-related topics  

- Support of peers  
  - Friends provide advice and can, “tell us to exercise” thus improving overall health  

-电脑使用为获取健康信息  
- 家家母和其他倡导者“来和我们谈谈”帮助我们了解与健康相关的话题  
- 支持同伴  
- 朋友提供建议和可以，“告诉我们做运动”从而改善总体健康

RESULTS Cont.,  

- Thoughts on Healthy Lifestyles  
  - One needs to, “make sure that the food you put into your tummy is clean and the equipment that you’re sharing is clean and also the environment.”  
  - Proper Hygiene  
  - Bathe twice a day, frequent handwashing, keeping clothes clean and a neat environment  
  - Breast health/ nipple care post-partum  
  - Management of stress  
  - Relievers include: praying, “read a book of encouragement,” and “think of people who love me,” yoga, exercise, sleep, relax, take baths, smile and think of positive messages.  
  - One participant reports, “when I have stress I rest with the baby” or “feed the baby.”

IMPLICATIONS: This study provided important insight into the thoughts and behaviors of young mothers in Jamaica. Multiple challenges were identified, including: lack of social support, feelings of isolation, peer pressure, drug use, poor sleep habits, bullying, inappropriate nutrition/unhealthy food choices and overall immaturity of group of mothers studied. The nurse has an integral role to provide education, counseling and resources to enhance the supports and reduce the challenges young mothers confront in their personal quests to attain and maintain health. Perhaps, even more important, is the need for nursing advocacy to influence gender issues, address bullying and provide interventions and resources to foster parenting, helping to ensure the health of current and future generations in Caribbean countries.