

SCHOOL NURSE CHALLENGE

Being a school nurse is a specialty healthcare practice providing safe and effective school health care for all school-age children. Their oversight and practice are specific to the school-age children within the school system(s).

The active school nurse practice includes—but is not limited to:

1. Assessing physical and psychological/emotional signs and symptoms of students needing nursing attention and care.
2. Planning nursing care for students who need health assessment due to medication intake.
3. Establishing healthcare regimes—such as providing timely medication administration, counseling, and monitoring positive and negative signs and symptoms related to medications and activities.
4. Teaching teachers and students about positive and negative signs and symptoms of mental and physical wellness.
5. Evaluating nurse and teacher mutual collaborative effectiveness to address health care plans and outcomes.
6. Modifying with teachers the ongoing healthful student activities for appropriate healthy outcomes.

Combining teachers' and nurses' roles in any school system provides the optimum team for specific health behaviors. This collaboration allows for optimum learning for every student, regardless of existing health issues. The team (teacher and nurse) represents the community's realistic understanding that children's intellectual astuteness and optimum learning abilities require a healthy body and mind.

Our youth are our future and are vulnerable due to their youth and lack of experience in healthful choices promoting their mind and body. How can we not care for them, love them, listen to them, and participate with school educators on their behalf? How can many other monetary efforts be placed before considering the children's mental and physical health for promoting lifelong learning?

Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine has determined that, on average, 20% of children have a mental health problem before graduating, with only approximately one-half receiving treatment. Only 15% of children who have mental health issues receive help for their mental disability.

The National Board of School Nurses, along with common-sense approaches, encourages:

1. Hiring at least one RN in every school—at least a ratio of 1:225 students.
2. Providing responsible pay for school nurses (ordinary income is less than hospital nurses).
3. Acknowledging the frustration for nurses due to excessive stress, anxiety, and burnout.
4. Considering the possibility of the Free Care Act Individual Education Plan (IEP) regarding billing for school nursing services.
5. Hiring nurses in a supportive teaching paraprofessional educator role. The role is often referred to as a para, para-pro, paraeducator, instructional assistant, educational assistant, teacher's aide, or classroom assistant.
6. Using nurses to help teach and support healthy lifetime behaviors.

7. Including school nurses in parent-teacher conferences.
8. Hiring a *professional* nurse (BSN or higher credentials) to help assure expertise.
9. Planning school nurse long-term goals that hopefully can be met in the future.
10. Taking small steps (at this time) for school nurse compliance if money and a professional nurse is not immediately available.
11. Learning the concept of the Boiling Frog Effect. It allows slow movement toward an optimal final goal(s). (The analogy is online under “Boiling Frog Effect” and was presented in this newspaper on 4-12-22.)
12. Recognizing that the number of registered nurses in the US is projected to grow by seven percent through 2029—faster than the average growth rate for all other professions.
13. Realizing that sick and unhealthy children have difficulty learning! Health is the prerequisite to their future ability to be successful and contribute effectively to our society.

Our responsibility is to find a way for all school children to experience optimum mental and physical health in conjunction with our school educational programs. This path requires a school nurse(s).

Carolyn Taylor, EdD MN RN

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