The Role of the School Nurse in Supporting Students with Special Health Needs

LINDA C. WOLFE, EdD, RN
STATE SCHOOL NURSE CONSULTANT
Children with Disabilities

**IDEA** - "Children with disabilities" or "students with disabilities" means children or students who require special education because of: autism; deafblindness; deafness; developmental delay; emotional disturbances; hearing impairment; intellectual disability; multiple disabilities; orthopedic impairments; other health impairments; specific learning disability; speech or language impairment; traumatic brain injury; visual impairment, including blindness (Center for Parent Information & Resources)

**Section 504 / ADA** – A disability is (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity; (2) a record of such impairment; or (3) being regarded as having such impairment.

**Medicaid/SSI** - A child with a disability must have a physical or mental condition, or a combination of conditions, that result in “marked and severe functional limitations.”

**Working Definition:** Any child with a physical or mental health deviation from generally accepted standard that significantly interferes or limits his/her ability to fully participate in family, education, or community activities. The limitation can be temporary or permanent, slight or severe.
Improved Health Outcomes

*Working Definition:* Improved physical or mental health condition as measured by the child’s ability to more fully participate in family, education, or community activities.
School Nurses See ALL Students

Healthcare systems see members of the community with access to their services.

School-based Health Centers see students, who are enrolled in their program.
Figure 1. Percentage distribution of children ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, by disability type: School year 2013–14

Disability type
- Specific learning disability: 35%
- Speech or language impairment: 21%
- Other health impairment: 18%
- Autism: 8%
- Intellectual disability: 7%
- Developmental delay: 6%
- Emotional disturbance: 5%
- Multiple disabilities: 2%
- Hearing impairment: 1%
- Orthopedic impairment: 1%
A State Example: North Carolina Exceptional Children

17% of student population receiving school nurse services related to chronic disease

School Nurses See ALL Students

- Screening requirements (established by states) require screening for all students, e.g., vision & hearing
  - Early identification
  - Important to IEP process to address health impact of struggles to learn
- Students in poverty seek school nursing services more than their peers (Fleming, 2011)
- Part of the continuum of care (AAP, 2016)
  - AAP recommends one school nurse per school.
  - Nursing delegation does not negate the need for the full time nurse
Roles of the School Nurse

School nurses assume many roles to meet the needs of their clients. It is perhaps the breadth of nurse activities subsumed within school nursing and the unique nonmedical practice setting that creates this specialty practice and differentiates it from other nursing specialties (Wolfe, 2013).

- Clinician
- Care Coordinator
- Early Identifier
- Liaison / Collaborator
- Counselor
- Health Educator
- Advocate
Clinician

Direct Nursing Care for illness, injury, and chronic health conditions

- There is a demonstrated relationship between health and education. A child’s health status supports the child’s ability, or inability, to learn. An adult’s educational status influences their health status. (ASCD, 2014).

- School nurses are “specialized instructional support personnel” who provide “assessment, diagnosis [nursing], counseling, . . . and other necessary services (including related services . . .) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs” (ESSA, 2015).
### A State Example: New Hampshire Health Care Procedures in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bladder Program</th>
<th>Glucose Testing</th>
<th>Respiratory Care (i.e. oxygen, postural drainage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood Glucose Testing</td>
<td>*Nebulizer</td>
<td>Stoma Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Bowel Program</td>
<td>Medications Intramuscular</td>
<td>Suctioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catheterization by Nurse or Aide</td>
<td>Medications Intravenous</td>
<td>Tracheostomy Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catheterization by child/youth</td>
<td>*Medication Oral</td>
<td>Tube Feedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialysis (Peritoneal)</td>
<td>*Medications Subcutaneous</td>
<td>Ventilator Assisted Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Diapering/Personal Toileting</td>
<td>Range of Motion Exercises</td>
<td>Vaccinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding Assistance (oral)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Special Medical Services School Nurse Survey, 2014*
A State Example: New Mexico Treatments & Medications Provided

New Mexico Annual School Health Services Report, 2014-2015
Care Coordinator

Activities
- Referrals
- Connecting families with resources and services
- Planning for care in the school setting, including emergency preparedness
- Training for staff
- Equipment and medication availability
- Transition Planning

“It is the position of the NASN that all children with chronic health conditions should receive coordinated and deliberate transition planning to maximize lifelong functioning and well-being” (National Association of School Nurses, 2014).
School nurse coordination improves readiness to learn, classroom participation, and academic performance for students with special health needs (Bethell, et. al., 2012)

6.5% of students experience a chronic health illness that impacts education performance (Hainalt, 2013)

School nurses can reduce the long-term impact of chronic health conditions on children through care coordination (McClanahan & Weismuller, 2015)

In a 4-year project with school nurse case management, 84% of students improved in one or more areas: attendance, behavior, academic performance, quality of life and health compliance (Bonaiuto, 2007).

School Nurse case management of students with asthma in one study resulted in >90% with emergency action plan, 67% reduced asthma triggers in the school environment, 67% of students less respiratory episodes, >80% increased knowledge and self-care skills, 100% of those targeted has fewer absences, 66% improved family collaboration, 70% improved utilization of healthcare provider, 69% decreased emergency room visits. The later two measures were associated with increased asthma control. (Engelke, Swanson, & Guttu, 2014)
Early Identifier

Hearing

Vision

Medical conditions
  ◦ Early identification and treatment of conditions improves clinical outcomes, e.g., head injuries (Bayreuthe & Maconochie, 2008)

Frequent absences

Emotional concerns

New Mexico Annual School Health Services Report, 2014-2015
Liaison / Collaboration with School and Health Communities

- School nurses are “bilingual” – education-ese & medical-ese
- School nurses work with families – education, access care, coordinate care (Jacobsen, Meeder, & Voskuil, 2016)
- School nurses bridge the gap in services
- Cost effective approach
  - For every $1.00 spent on school nursing services, $2.20 is saved in medical cost and time for parents and teachers (Wang, et. al, 2012)
- School nurses help students with disabilities to better address teasing and bullying situations (Vessey, 2011)
Counselor, Health Educator, & Advocate

- Typically are the first healthcare provider to see the child for health complaints, which may be more emotional-health related
  - Work closely with school counselors, psychologists, and social workers when available

School nurse is the resident health expert
- Opportunities for health education in the classroom, one-on-one, small groups of students, families, educators, community
- Children with Type I Diabetes reported nurses play a “key role” with hyper- and hypo-glycemia levels by providing appropriate treatment. The students also said that he nurse can also “help by educating classmates about their diabetes”. Further, the lack of school nurses at after-school events kept them from participating (Lehmkuhl & Nabors, 2007)
Tools for Schools

- Individual Education Program (IEP)
- Section 504 Accommodation Plan (504)
- Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHP)
- Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
  - Emergency Healthcare Plan (EHP)
Student Health Outcomes impacted by School Nursing Services

Early Identification

Reduced Absences

- Less absenteeism and fewer early dismissals in schools with a full-time school nurse (Maughan, 2016)
- “Education is free. Healthcare is not.” School nurse provide and bridge the gap for families in poverty or living in healthcare deserts (Maughan, 2016)
- “Children with chronic illness are absent from schools for an average of 16 days a year compared to a 3-day average for health children” (McCabe & Shaw, 2008)
- “School nurses were involved with 75% of high-absence students as compared to 66% of low-absence students; they were also more involved with students who had previously identified health conditions” (Weismuller, et. al, 2007).

Better Health through management of chronic conditions

- Occurs through individual case management
- Students have increased access to education and improved health, which benefits providers & insurers
Step Up & Be Counted!
(https://www.nasn.org/Research/StepUpBeCounted)
STUDENTS DIAGNOSED WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS

ASTHMA
48.5/1000 students

SEIZURE DISORDER
5.2/1000 students

DIABETES
Type 1 = 2.1/1000 students
Type 2 = 0.4/1000 students

LIFE-THREATENING ALLERGY
15.5/1000 students
School Nurses
Make a Difference
References & Resources


Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).


References & Resources


References & Resources


