

## Qualifications and Utilization of Nursing Personnel Delivering Health Services in Schools

The demands of school nursing services have grown rapidly in recent years. Nursing personnel who work on a day-to-day basis with schoolchildren should have the expertise required to meet these ever-increasing demands.

Today's school nurse should be equipped to assess health problems related to infectious diseases such as immunodeficiency and herpes, pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse (including sexual abuse), chronically disorganized families, mental illness/depression and suicide, eating disorders, physical and learning disabilities, athletic injuries, poor nutrition, and chronic disease. It is important that the school nurse be able to recognize and manage minor illness, offer skilled health counseling and guidance, detect potential health problems, make appropriate medical referrals, and act as the personal physician's extension into the school setting to meet the health needs of the child patient during the school day.

### SCHOOLCHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The mandates of Public Law 94-142 create an additional need for professional nursing services in schools. Children with varying degrees of disabilities are now in the regular school setting. Many of these students require specialized caretaking procedures such as tracheostomy suctioning, catheterization, ostomy care, nasogastric tube feeding, or maintenance of orthopedic devices.<sup>1</sup> Some children require administration of medications with varying side effects, in varying amounts, and at varying times during the school day. It is often important that a professional school nurse assess the problem, consult with the child's physician or school medical

consultant, and administer the physician-prescribed services.

In preschool programs and classrooms for the severely disabled, the professional school nurse working with the child's regular physician, the school medical consultant, or a local health officer should provide in-service instruction regarding prevention of the spread of infectious disease and provide supervision of handwashing, diapering, custodial concerns, and methods of food handling.

Some school districts have hired health aides and/or licensed vocational nurses to meet the school health needs of students and staff. These paraprofessionals are not equipped to recognize, assess, manage, or make appropriate referrals for the myriad health problems now being handled in schools. If paraprofessionals are used to perform specialized caretaking procedures, the school physician or school nurse should determine competence, conduct in-service training, and then provide regular supervision and documentation of the paraprofessionals' competence.

### STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL NURSING SERVICE

The American Academy of Pediatrics supports the goal of professional preparation for school nurses. Qualifications for the professional school nurse should include licensure as a registered nurse and a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university. Additionally, there should be a process by which certification/licensure for the school nurse is established by the appropriate state board.<sup>2</sup>

The AAP further recommends use of school nurses, not paraprofessionals, to deliver day-to-day nursing services and health counseling to children in schools. When paraprofessionals are part of the school health team, their performance of nursing services should be directly supervised by a professionally prepared and licensed school nurse.

This statement has been approved by the Council on Child and Adolescent Health.

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