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FUNCTIONS OF THE NURSE
IN A
SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM

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FUNCTIONS OF THE NURSE IN A SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM

The function of a public health nurse in a school health program is to participate in formulating and developing a health program that will be educational. She utilizes all the activities and situations within the school and community for the development of the physical, mental, and emotional life of the child.

The nurse assists the teacher in encouraging the pupils through classroom activities to acquire the knowledge necessary to the establishment of healthful practices and attitudes.

The classroom activities are the responsibility of the teacher but the nurse brings to her attention the needs of the children as indicated through:

- A study of the causes of absence.
- Information recorded on health cards.
- Conferences with parents in the home and at the school.
- Observation of home conditions and family relationships.

The nurse assists the teacher to integrate health knowledge with other classroom activities. Such knowledge may include facts regarding:

- The structure and functions of the human body.
- The growth and development of the body.
- Nutrition.
- The essentials for a healthful environment.
- Personal hygiene.
- The causes, prevention, and symptoms of disease.

The nurse may suggest that communicable diseases be studied when there are cases in the school or in the community, and both pupils and teachers are especially interested.

The nurse helps the teacher to encourage the pupils to become self-directive in the practice of health habits through utilization of school equipment to the best advantage for the protection of health; for example, washing of hands, proper use of toilets, and regulations of heat, light, ventilation. The nurse collects authoritative health literature, and helps parents, teachers, and pupils to evaluate

material which they read in current books, newspapers, and periodicals, and hear over the radio.

The nurse acquaints parents, teachers, and pupils with the indications of good health. She helps them to develop an ability to recognize deviations from the normal, and to direct their behavior accordingly.

She stresses the fact that good health is more than freedom from disease. She aids parents, teachers, and pupils to develop the habit of thinking in terms of optimal health, and assists them to assume responsibility for their own welfare. She encourages parents and teachers to be alert to evidence of deviations from the normal. The health inspection, health examination, and other health procedures carried out in the school may be used to demonstrate signs which are significant in selecting pupils who need special health supervision or medical care. The nurse also explains to teachers the significance of their observations and helps them to recognize symptoms which are of consequence.

Through home visits and individual conferences in the school, the nurse helps the parents to recognize the importance of the early establishment of habits which contribute to health. The nurse uses every contact with the child to teach health and help him understand the value of the school health program.

The nurse promotes the maintenance of a safe and healthful environment in the school, home and community.

Through routine surveys of the school, the nurse becomes familiar with the condition of the building and the grounds. She encourages such surveys by teachers and pupils and helps them to understand the methods used to protect the health of pupils and personnel. She explains how they may cooperate with the school authorities toward this end. The nurse participates in school planning for adequate lighting

and proper heating and ventilation; and for adequate sanitary facilities, including washrooms with soap and paper towels. She helps parents, teachers, and school authorities to understand the relationship between environment and health. She reports health and safety hazards-- including fire hazards--to the proper authorities, and aids in securing safety devices for workshop and laboratory. The nurse encourages consideration of traffic rules and regulations for the prevention of street accidents. She also discusses the cause and prevention of accidents in the home.

The nurse teaches the value of adequate health supervision, which includes the selection and consultation of family physician and dentist.

The nurse teaches the relationship between health supervision and the prevention of disease. She helps to develop an educational program of health supervision for the school child which may be extended to other members of the family and continued by the pupil after he leaves school. The nurse works with parents, assisting them to assume the responsibility for health supervision of the family. She may also cooperate with the local physicians in an effort to develop an interest in a program of health supervision for their private patients. Families who need assistance in selecting a physician or dentist may be referred to the local medical or dental society for such guidance.

The nurse acquaints parents, teachers, and pupils with community facilities for medical care and aids in the development of such facilities.

The nurse will familiarize herself with all of the sources of medical care in the community. A study of the health needs of

children frequently aids in the development of facilities to meet these needs. The nurse may encourage such a study by an organized group within the community such as the parent-teacher association or council of social agencies. She may provide such a committee with schedules for reporting on community facilities, assist them in securing information, and refer them to agencies which will help in interpreting the situation or give standards with which they can compare the local services. When bedside nursing care is not included in the program of the nurse in the school, she is responsible for helping the family secure care from the organizations in the community which offer this service.

The nurse assists in securing physical examinations of pupils, having this responsibility assumed by the family when possible. She arranges for and assists with the examinations of pupils at school.

The preliminary arrangement for the examination may begin with the school health inspection which is made by either the teacher or the nurse and followed by a joint conference between them. By means of this screening process the children most in need of an examination are selected. Before the health examination, the nurse collects and records all the information available regarding each pupil, for the use of the examining physician. This will include:

- History of previous illness,
- History of immunization and tests for immunity,
- Observations of the nurse or teacher during the health inspection,
- Summary of significant observations by the teacher, parent, and nurse,
- Facts regarding the family, which relate to the health of the child.

The cooperation of the physician, teacher, parent, and nurse is necessary in order to make the health examination a pleasant and

educational experience for the child. The duties of the nurse include the following:

1. She plans with the physician and principal the date and time of the examination and the procedure to be followed.

2. She interprets to the teachers the purpose, scope, and method of the examination and secures their co-operation in interpreting the examination to the pupils.

3. She interprets to the local physicians, whenever she has an opportunity, the purpose of the school in having records of the physical status of the pupils.

4. She informs the teachers and parents of the benefits of a physical examination by the family physician. Parents may be informed through letters signed by the school superintendent or principal, and through parents' meetings.

5. She sees that all necessary equipment is assembled and makes the arrangements which are necessary to prevent confusion and waste of time and to provide privacy and comfort for the pupil and his parent.

6. She notifies parents of the school examination, secure their consent, and invites them to be present. An appointment is given in order to avoid unnecessary waiting. A comfortable waiting room with chairs is provided. Health literature is made available for parents to read while waiting.

7. She assists at the time of the examination, by greeting parents and interpreting to both pupils and parents the value of the examination.

The nurse interprets the findings of the health examination by the school physician or private physician to the teachers, parents, and pupils, and when necessary assists parents in arranging for the

correction of defects.

In making arrangements for the examination the nurse provides an opportunity for the physician to discuss his findings with the parents. On visits to the home and during individual conferences at school, the nurse discusses with parents the physical findings of the physician and the need for a better health regimen or for medical care. She interprets to the family the difference in scope between the examinations given by the school physician and by the family physician and the advantages of the latter. She acquaints parents with community facilities for the correction of defects, and urges care by the family physician when possible.

Before making home visits to follow up the examination of a private physician, the nurse always consults the physician. Many nurses make a practice of consulting the private physician before starting any follow-up work on the school examinations. This practice gives the nurse an opportunity to get instructions from the family physician and secure the information which she needs in order to make an effective home visit. In some cases she will find that the home visit is not necessary, since arrangement will have already been made for medical care.

The nurse participates in arranging for special facilities in the school and community for the care of handicapped children-- facilities adapted to the needs of each child, including the child confined to his home as well as the child in school. She interprets the need for such facilities to parents, pupils, and school personnel. The nurse aids in the prevention of handicaps by acquainting parents, teachers, and pupils with possible causes of such conditions and by assisting to provide a safe, healthful environment in the home, school,

and community.

The control of communicable diseases is legally the function of the health department. Since children of school age are especially susceptible to many of these diseases, the school program for communicable disease control is important. The role of the nurse in this program is as follows:

1. She interprets the regulations and instructions of the health department to parents, pupils, and school personnel.
2. She teaches the importance of immunization and of recognition of early symptoms, and the advantage of early isolation.
3. She assists in making inspections for communicable disease.
4. She helps parents, teachers, and pupils realize the value of early diagnosis and treatment of communicable diseases.
5. She helps parents, teachers, and pupils recognize their responsibility in the prevention and control of communicable disease.
6. She assists in exchanging reports of communicable diseases with the health department.
7. She assists in planning teaching projects on communicable diseases when there are cases in the school or community.

The nurse assists in setting up procedures for the care of injuries and in securing medical approval of instructions for emergency treatment of pupils who are injured or become ill at school. She teaches parents, older students, and teachers how first-aid procedures may be carried out in the home or school and emphasizes the importance of accident prevention. She encourages parents and pupils to assume responsibility for securing care for injuries.

The nurse who is qualified to teach may conduct classes in the principles of healthful living, care of the sick, and child care.

Plans for teaching classes in home hygiene and care of the sick have been outlined by the American Red Cross. Through such classes a great deal of important health information may be given to high-school pupils. It is suggested that special emphasis be placed on the importance of maternal care, and infant, preschool, and school health supervision. These classes offer a natural and informal approach to sex hygiene. Giving information in this way is preferred to conducting formal classes in sex education.

She promotes a well rounded program in health education. She suggests ways in which health content fits into the general courses and program of activities. She points out factors in the curriculum which are detrimental to health. She interprets the needs of special age-groups as shown by studies of child development, findings of medical examinations, and observations in homes.

The nurse's opportunities for making a contribution to curriculum-building are increased if she serves as a member of the curriculum committee or the coordinating committee.

OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NURSE IN SCHOOLS

Altho the general purposes of nurses in different school situations are often the same, the functions and emphases are affected by a variety of conditions. Probably the most important single factor is the leadership offered by the school administrator. His insight into health matters will influence the type of program in the school, the school's relationship with the community, and the selection of health personnel. The qualifications of the nurse, both academic preparation and experience, help to determine the scope and quality of her work. Closely allied to the nurse's qualifications is the preparation and willingness of the teaching staff to carry on a high standard of child health supervision and education. If the teacher has inadequate knowledge of child growth and development, of environmental conditions affecting health, of signs of health disturbance, of community resources for health protection and promotion obviously the nurse will need to help her acquire these knowledges and skills. On the other hand, if teachers are relatively well versed in health matters, the nurse gives her time to working more intensively with families and with pupils needing individual help with problems.

The health needs of pupils, the kind and quality of community resources, and the size, location, and type of school are all taken into consideration in determining functions and emphasis of the nurse. In the one-room rural school most health functions sponsored by the school are carried on thru the cooperative efforts of two individuals, the teacher and the nurse. In some other schools, according to studies by the National Survey of Secondary Education,

thirty different types of workers contributed to health work. The functions of the nurse will be affected by the measure of responsibility assumed by these personnel members. Finally, the functions of the nurse carrying on a general program under a department of health will be influenced by the concept of school health work held by her director and supervisor, by the press of other duties, and by the interest and cooperation of the school administrator in the community health program.

No one nurse would be expected to perform all the functions which will be enumerated. An attempt has been made to suggest possible contributions which can be made by a well-qualified nurse, if the conditions call for these functions. The situation will need to be analyzed by the administrator as well as by the nurse, and her functions determined after careful consideration of all relevant factors. Objectives and functions will be discussed here under three headings: (a) those which apply to a large variety of situations in elementary schools; (b) modifications in emphasis suggested for secondary schools; and (c) implications for rural schools.

Bonser has aptly stated that "any discussion of school work must be tested finally by its relation to fundamental underlying principles." It is with this thought in mind that an attempt will be made to show how the nurse applies the principles of education in determining her objectives and contributes to the aims of education in performing her functions. The nurse as well as the teacher must have "knowledge of immediate life problems, together with knowledge of race experience and its use in relation to present interests and problems."

"The whole curriculum is divided into pieces of human experience, and not into pieces of formal knowledge. . . .The school curriculum should be a series of carefully guided experiences of the learner, as varied as the demands and pursuits of a well-ordered life."

The health program and particularly those experiences centering in and around the health office offer opportunities unparalleled in any other field in school for giving pupils "carefully guided experiences" of immediate worth; and yet it is unusual to find them included in any course of study as an integral part of the whole. If included at all they are considered in the introduction and then promptly forgotten. There must be some way of bridging the gap between so-called "health service" and "health education" as far as the health office activities are concerned. Just as long as we continue to think of them as separate aspects of health in the program of the school, just so long will there be a real cleavage. Careful thought shows that the real difference is one of quality rather than of kind. This report considers all health office activities as potential learning experience which offer varied opportunities for pupil participation.

The final analysis will show that the nurse's functions include relationships with the school administrator, the teacher, the pupils, the family, the personal physician, and other community health and social workers, in order that her health objectives shall be attained.

The ten health objectives of school nursing are:

1. To stimulate in every child a desire to safeguard his own health thru intelligent application of scientific knowledge. This involves an understanding of the child by the nurse, the teachers, and the parents, and a recognition of the need for health

- supervision, under medical direction, at home and at school
2. To assist the school in its program of home and school cooperation in matters pertaining to health.
 3. To establish rapport with all members of the school personnel thru economical and coordinated effort based upon a true knowledge of existing conditions.
 4. To contribute to the school's aims in educational and vocational guidance.
 5. To lend intelligent help to the school in its task of promoting and maintaining a healthful school environment, physical, emotional, and social.
 6. To create a desire for and a knowledge of how to obtain medical and dental service.
 7. To contribute to the community's plan for prevention and control of communicable diseases by interpreting that plan to the school personnel and by helping the school and its pupils, and parents, to assume their share of responsibility for furthering the plan, not only with respect to school-age children but also with reference to families of which they are a part.
 8. To assist the school administrator and the physician to secure for every child the most immediate and intelligent care possible in the situation in the event of illness or injury at school, and to give parents intelligent leadership in securing further medical advice and treatment.
 9. To aid the school in its problem of attendance, placing emphasis upon legitimate absence as well as upon regular attendance.
 10. To assist the school to make available to the handicapped child opportunities for education comparable to those of the normal child.

within the realm of possibility in the situation.

(These objectives were taken from a report of the Joint Committee on Health Problems in Education of the National Education Association and the American Medical Association.)