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Anne H. Sheetz

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How May the State School Nurse Consultant Support School Nursing Research?

Anne H. Sheetz, RN, BSN, MPH, CNAA, Massachusetts

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A sound foundation of research and evidence-based practice is essential for school nursing practice. This foundation will contribute to a strong knowledge base, accountability, credibility as a discipline, and recommendations for policy at local, state, and national levels (Vessey & Massachusetts School Nurse Research Network [MASNRN] Oversight Board, 2007). In 2002, the National Nursing Coalition for School Health prioritized the top three research issues for school nursing: (1) impact of School Nurse services on student health, (2) relationship between School Nurse practice and educational outcomes, and (3) benefits and cost of school health services (Edwards, 2003). Selekman and Guilday (2003) described 10 broad categories of desired outcomes of school nursing practice, reinforcing the need for research in this critical nursing specialty area.

The State School Nurse Consultant (SSNC) is uniquely positioned to guide, facilitate, and encourage the development of the state's school nursing research agenda by doing the following:

1. **Creating a "research climate":** Creating a research climate and building state-wide research capacity are challenging because interest and skill among the School Nurses must be carefully nurtured. Through interactions with School Nurses, the SSNC has numerous opportunities to learn the

research interests and needs within the state. In many states, the SSNC, through the parent state agency, funds certain educational programs for School Nurses. In this capacity, she or he may require the incorporation of research skills into program content. Beginning steps must be achieved by understanding the role of research, developing writing skills, identifying a research question, and offering opportunities to present to colleagues.

2. **Establishing guidelines for research:** As school health becomes recognized as a treasure of child health research questions, many university researchers identify School Nurses as entry points into the school for a wide variety of health studies and surveillance initiatives. The SSNC is uniquely positioned to know the state's college and university research resources and broker university/school nursing alliances. The SSNC can provide guidance as to what child health studies are appropriate in the school setting. Human study protocols must be adhered to and administrative approvals obtained; often schools do not have institutional review boards in place. Although local universities may be extremely helpful in promoting the school health research agenda, the SSNC must be diligent in promoting *true functioning partnerships* between university researchers and School Nurses. Too often external researchers have relied on School Nurses to shepherd a study through the administrative approval

process, obtain parental consent, and implement major portions of the actual study—without including them in presentation or publication authorship. If managed carefully, the School Nurse/university partnership may be a win-win situation. Researchers have the critical skills to develop the question and study methodology; School Nurses have the skills and relationships to put the study into action. When School Nurses collaborate on a given project, it is reasonable to request that the researcher include the School Nurse in publication and presentation efforts, meanwhile teaching such skills as literature review, writing for publication, and presentation development, thus developing state-wide School Nurse research capacity.

3. **Developing effective models:** The Massachusetts experience in smoking cessation provides a positive, functional example of university/School Nurse collaboration. During the 1990s, the implementation of school-based group smoking-cessation programs had met with limited success. In 1999, the SSNC and her staff worked with the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, Department of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS), to implement focus groups of high school School Nurses designed to elicit their ideas for a workable solution. On the basis of their input, the UMMS convened a group of School Nurses and jointly developed a program of School Nurse

individual interventions to assist students to stop smoking. In 2002-2003, the UMMS, collaborating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health School Health Unit (MDPH-SHU), implemented a randomized, controlled, school-based pilot study in 71 high schools, whereby School Nurses delivered individual interventions to help youth stop using tobacco. Extremely promising results indicated the potential for School Nurses to have a significant impact on smoking cessation among adolescents (Pbert et al., 2006). Beginning in 2006, the UMMS, again collaborating with the MDPH-SHU and funded by the National Institutes of Health, began conducting further long-term evaluations of School Nurse interventions. In this process, the UMMS researchers not only partnered with the School Nurses to develop and implement the study; they also assisted them in writing an article on the importance of School Nurse-student relationships in the intervention's success.

The SSNC also might consider facilitating the development of a school nursing research network. In 2004, the MASNRRN was launched. MASNRRN represents a unique partnership of the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization (MSNO), the Boston College Connell School of Nursing (BCCSN), and the MDPH-SHU

(Vessey & MASNRRN Oversight Board, 2007). Its members believe that students need and deserve high-quality school nursing care to help to attain their full academic potential. MASNRRN Oversight Board members volunteer their time, meeting monthly to determine the research agenda, plan studies, seek funding, and provide programs to develop School Nurses' research knowledge and skills. MASNRRN has relied on support from Boston College for research and grant writing expertise, its institutional review board, and experience in establishing practice-based research networks. To date, there are more than 90 School Nurse members. Several studies have been completed and others are in progress. The ever-expanding enthusiasm of participating School Nurses has been impressive.

The Future

The next exciting frontier for school nursing research is the implementation of studies extending beyond state boundaries. This will lend increased credibility and applicability of findings. It is also an opportunity for SSNCs and School Nurses to forge new alliances to improve child health as well as professional development!

To discuss the school nursing research, please contact your SSNC. To locate contact information for your SSNC, please

visit the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants' Web site at www.nassnc.org and click on "About Us" to gain access to a listing of our members. ■

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Anne H. Sheetz, RN, BSN, MPH, CNAA
Director of School Health Services
Massachusetts Department of
Public Health
Anne is also a member of the
Massachusetts School Nurse
Research Network (MASNRRN)
Oversight Board.