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State Nurse Consultants Q&A

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NASN School Nurse 2004; 19; 14

DOI: 10.1177/104747570401900504

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National Association of School Nurses

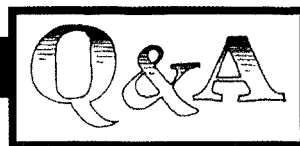
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By Donna Mayzck, MS, RN, NCSN, Maryland

Q : I am a school nurse who has just been promoted to a school health services leadership role. How do I obtain the skills necessary for me to be successful in this transition?

A : The exciting news of a promotion in one's career is accompanied by various thoughts and feelings. New school health services supervisors often bring excellent clinical and organizational skills to their new positions. However, not every new school nurse supervisor has an orientation specific to the role. How can a new school health services supervisor receive specific orientation to this leadership position?

In 2001, the Maryland State School Nurse Consultants recognized this void and offered a day-long seminar to introduce new school health services supervisors to the role, as well as the resources available to them. A second seminar was offered in 2003 as more new supervisors joined the ranks. The overarching categories covered in the seminar were administrative and clinical topics.

The attendees were introduced to the state school health services team and to one another. A variety of topics were covered throughout the first half of the day. Topics included time management, public relations skills, and basics in supervision. Part of the discussion on supervision included the value of work-style assessments as a means of enhancing the supervision process. Next on the agenda was a review of the federal and state laws that impact school health services, including the nurse practice act. The new supervisors also received an orientation to the Maryland State School Health Services Guidelines and the data collection requirements of the state education and health departments. Some time was allocated for a discussion of the budget process and politics that may be encountered in the role.

The importance of the nursing process as a way to guide the work of school nurses provided a framework for the clinical topics. The vital importance of nursing assessments was emphasized. Professional development (personal and for their staff) and teaching methods were other topics presented to the new supervisors. A list of resources, both human and otherwise, left the supervisors with a touchstone for future needs.

One of the most well received activities of the seminar was the time set aside for more seasoned supervisors to present pearls of wisdom from their experiences. Their presentations and the informal networking they provided during lunch proved invaluable to each new supervisor. Not only did participants obtain practical tips on moving forward in their jobs, but they also made connections with those who could possibly mentor them.

In addition to the orientation, the state school nurse consultants in Maryland, along with their colleagues in the state department of health, hold four administrative meetings a year to keep the school health supervisors updated on topics in school nursing. In addition, newsletters and e-mail surveys keep them informed. New supervisors welcomed the opportunity to add to their professional development in a specific way through this orientation to school health services administration. The state school nurse consultants welcomed the opportunity to fill a void in the leadership development of the supervisors. Ongoing leadership development has been offered at our annual School Health Interdisciplinary Program each summer.

Note: Other states may have similar orientation programs for new school nurse leaders, or this subject may be addressed during conferences offered through professional associations. We suggest contacting your state school nurse consultant and/or the school nurse's organization in your state for additional suggestions and resources.