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The Future of School Nursing Practice

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The Future of School Nursing Practice

We asked the membership of the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants (NASSNC) to gaze into their "crystal ball" and predict the future of school nursing practice. Their responses follow.

Question: What does the future hold for school health services, school nursing, and student health?

Answer: Will the future be bleak, with fewer and fewer students having access to a school nurse because of budget cuts? On the contrary, I believe that school nurses will take a proactive role under the guidance of NASN and their state associations. Every school nurse across the country will work to educate the public and policy makers about their role and the health needs of students in their care. Every school nurse will become involved in their organization and, through strength in numbers, NASN and state associations will become a powerful lobby for the needs of school-age children. We must make our voice heard lest "Every Child Left Behind".—**Victoria Jackson, Illinois**

Answer: In the future, we will have virtual school health services directed by a technically advanced nurse from a remote location. Wireless audio and visual communication systems will enable nurses to interact with students and staff that continue to assemble for their education. Students and staff will use a system that provides privacy to communicate their concerns and allows the nurse to assess and provide appropriate interventions. Interventions will be either self-applied or robotically assisted with nurse direction. Systems will be capable of developing an individualized nurse-directed therapeutic environment providing healing smells, sounds, and visual stimuli. Touch will be provided through soft pressurized fabric that is worn by the student. The virtual system will be able to dispense medication and conduct simple interventions like ice and Band-Aids. The "nurse" will be able to monitor the effect of the intervention or will direct the student to leave the learning structure to be transported home or to a second level of health intervention with the assistance of a droid or caring adult.—**Linda Caldart-Olson, Wisconsin**

Answer: The "nurse" will send a student who does not pass a visual, hearing, dental, or scoliosis screening to an intervention room within the educational building for cor-

rection of any defects. I envision it like an enclosed shower, to which the nurse could dial in the appropriate coordinates for correction of the defects which, within minutes, would be corrected. During the time the corrections were being made, there would be parental encouraging sounds and touches; there would be no pain.

I remember when I was in nursing school, a speaker talked about off-site training in which students were at one site, the instructor was at another site, and a nurse was at a different location checking the vital signs of a patient, but all were visibly communicating with each other. We thought it would never happen—science fiction.—**Gwen Smith, Virginia**

Answer: In the future, I see school nurses as leaders in youth development. Repeated studies have established that young people who participate in high-quality youth development programs are more likely to be active voting citizens, settled in stable personal relationships, employed and economically self-sufficient, and happy with their lives as young adults, compared with those who did not participate in programs. They also have greater trust in their parents. These are important, measurable benefits to the community. Investment in youth is investment in healthy communities.—**Carol Hinton, Iowa**

Answer: I see school nursing as a recognized critical component of the health care deliver system serving children. It would be closely linked to the primary care provider community and parents (communication systems and collaboration) so that we form a circle of safety around our youth and, in the process, support their educational achievement. We in school health would truly provide the safety net for all children.—**Anne Sheetz, Massachusetts**

Answer: All children will have a computerized chip in a necklace or bracelet, or perhaps even inserted under the skin at birth, that will house all their health information, including allergies, prescribed medications, immunization history, health history, last health assessment, etc., allowing a mobile society to ensure updated health information wherever they are.—**Christine Tuck, Kansas**

Answer: The connection between health and academic performance is recognized by all members of society and

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solidly supported through legislation. Adequate funding of the school health program at each school site provides a continuum of appropriate level of care for students' health needs. Recognized as the primary health care provider in the school setting, the credentialed school nurse, in collaboration with school administration and the school physician as needed, using the scope and standards of school nursing practice, provides coordination, training, and supervision for other school health care givers, such as RNs, LVN/LPNs, health assistants, and health office volunteers.—**Linda Davis-Aldritt, California**

Answer: A secure electronic health record will make possible timely communication and coordination between all individuals involved in a child's health care, thus improving health outcomes for children. Specific data from the electronic health record will be linked with data from the child's electronic education record, making the information needed to support the link between health and education only a click away. School nurses will be required members of the health care system for children and will work closely with parents, primary care providers, and the public health authority to ensure that the needs of children are met. As we are better able to understand how technology might be used to improve the quality of life for children with chronic health conditions, I anticipate more inventions that will make student self-management in the classroom the norm rather than the exception. The patents for many of these inventions will belong to school nurses. Despite technological advances, head lice will continue to be a challenge.—**Cathy Young-Jones, South Carolina**

Answer: I foresee the certified school nurse as becoming a much more prominent figure because of the rise in disaster preparedness necessary to ensure the safety of our children. Because of her unique position, with respect to knowledge of pertinent medical information for both staff and students, the nurse will be a dominant player in the planning for any type of disastrous event. Her assessment skills will be of considerable value in providing early intervention. She will be the only person in the school building who will be able to coordinate efforts for the children with special needs in providing evacuation procedures and mobilizing the equipment that will be needed to provide adequate care. "Post-vention" care will be provided by the school nurse in addressing the typical reactions (emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physio-

is task that will
having nurses in every school and on every team that must address the procedures necessary to ensure the health and safety of all students, staff, and families.—

Marilyn Kent, New Jersey

Answer: The future for school nursing is ripe with promise. Health services will expand to meet the needs of children with complex health conditions. This will bring new technologies and collaborations to the school, with the school nurses being the cornerstone of children's health care. As optimal academic success is sought, educators will fully recognize and value the fact that healthy children are better learners; thus, health promotion will be fully integrated into schools.—**Linda Wolfe, Delaware**

Answer: For me, school nursing practice will return to the principles supported by Lillian Wald and Florence Nightengale. Essentially, we will go back to the future. I believe we will still have the art of nursing at the center of our practices and that our practices will be population-based, focused on primary prevention, on a collaborative model.—**Marjorie Cole, Missouri**

Answer: I see school nurses as leaders in the promotion of health and wellness for youth. Although I understand the need for school nurses to address ongoing, chronic, and acute illnesses in schools, I would like to see school nurses have additional time, resources, and support to implement health and wellness activities and prevention education. It would be wonderful if school nurses could take the lead in being proactive regarding health care and early intervention.—**Cheryl Carotenuti, Connecticut**

Answer: I see school nurses as change agents, providing guidance to students, staff, parents, and families so that individuals are empowered to participate more fully in their own health outcomes. I see a future in which health care is defined by the consumer, rather than the medical establishment or third-party payors. If a hospitalized patient desired an acupuncture treatment, for example, it would be provided and covered. Health benefits will become truly portable and available to people through various organizations, not just employers. This transition comes about through health education and the promotion of self-responsibility and wellness that we are instilling in our students today. We are sowing the seeds for the future. Care for them and teach them well.—**Michelle McComb, Texas**

Do you have a question for the consultants? If so, visit the NASSNC Web site, <http://lserver.aea14.k12.ia.us/swp/tadkins/nassnc/NASSNC.html>, and click on "e-mail NASSNC" at the bottom of the home page.