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National Association of State School Nurse Consultants: Supervision of School Health Nurses

By Vicki Taliaferro, RN, BSN, NCSN, School Nurse Consultant, Maryland

Question: What credentials and skills should the supervisor of school nurses possess?

Answer: Constant advances in medical technology have resulted in more students with special health care needs attending school and placing new demands on school districts. As a result, local school boards must provide sufficient staff and resources to safely meet the needs of students with chronic or urgent health care needs by providing a level of school health nursing services previously not required. Costs for school nursing personnel remain an issue. However, safe care for students must be the priority, and measures must be in place to safeguard the integrity and quality of the nursing services provided to students and to protect the school system.

School administrators are legally responsible for the safety of all students, including the provision of required health services by qualified staff. They have certain responsibilities regarding the educational placement of students but cannot legally be responsible for deciding the competency of a school nurse's clinical practice. Most states' Nurse Practice Acts require that nurses be supervised by another nurse. Therefore, it is important that a registered nurse supervise all clinical aspects of school nursing practice. Basic employment supervision (dress code, punctuality, etc.) can be handled by a campus administrator.

Question: What makes school nursing unique?

Answer: School nursing services are essential for the health and well being of the student population and for the students to benefit from educational programs and to maximize energy for learning. Both the volume and range of nursing services that must be provided at schools have increased dramatically over the past decade. Nursing is a profession that requires a unique license to practice, and this practice is directed by specific laws and regulations in each state. School nursing is a unique, independent prac-

tice arena in which the school nurse is often the only health care staff on site. Within nursing, school nursing is a recognized specialty.

A registered nurse must supervise certain aspects of a school nurse's clinical practice. These services should be directly provided by a qualified school nurse manager who is a licensed registered nurse and who has experience in school nursing practice. The school nurse manager must evaluate the school nurse's practice and provide technical assistance to the school nurse with regard to his or her nursing practice. School administrators and other non-nurse personnel may be able to supervise school nurses for administrative issues including attendance and job assignments, but they cannot supervise a school nurse's practice. **The school nurse manager should be responsible for the hiring, training, supervising, and evaluation of the school nurse.**

Question: How many supervisors are required?

Answer: Supervision requires the provision of initial direction and the periodic inspection of tasks and activities through completion. There must be enough supervisors to provide this direction to staff and to ensure that students are staying as well as is possible. When setting ratios for the safe and effective supervision of school nursing activities, many factors need to be considered, including:

- Supervisor competence.
- Scope of nursing services.
- Number of school nurses.
- Needs of the students they serve.
- School setting.

Summary

Schools have an obligation to ensure the quality and safe provision of school nursing services as necessary for

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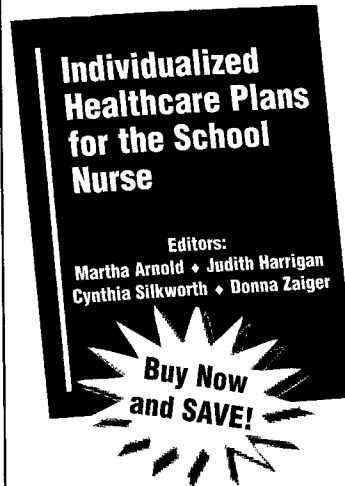
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the health and well being of all students. Therefore, services should be provided by qualified nursing personnel and with utmost regard for protecting the student. School nursing services should be directly supervised by a licensed professional (registered nurse) school nurse manager, and an adequate number of supervisors must be established on the basis of the scope of school nursing services, the number of school nurses, and the intensity of services required by students.

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