



POSITION STATEMENT

Delegation

HISTORY:

Advances in health care and technology offer greater opportunities for children with special health care needs to attend school. Considering the complexity of the care needed by these students, delegation of care by the school nurse to an unlicensed person in the school setting, can be a safe and fiscally responsible way to meet the health needs of the school community. Nevertheless, the school community must be aware that, to ensure the safety, health, and educational success of these students, there are limitations to the use of delegation.

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE:

The incidence of chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma, diabetes, attention deficit disorder) in school-age children is increasing. In addition, complex medical problems that were at one time only managed at inpatient settings are now being managed in the community, including the school setting. Federal mandates and parental expectations that the school is indeed able to manage their child, raises the demands for qualified personnel to ensure the health and safety of students with special health needs.

Delegation has been defined as "the transfer of responsibility for the performance of an activity to another, with the former retaining accountability for the outcome" (ANA, 1994, 11). Guidelines and standards for delegation of nursing care are further defined by the nurse practice act and its associated rules and regulations.

Delegation of nursing care is a complex legal and clinical issue in any setting, and is especially challenging in schools. It is the school nurse who must have a clear understanding of what constitutes his or her scope of practice to ensure that the nursing practice act is not violated, and to make certain that school health and safety are not threatened. In turn, this knowledge needs to be communicated to parents, administrators, school staff, and students to ensure they understand the legal and professional issues involved in delegation.

RATIONALE:

Only a registered nurse can delegate nursing care. It is critical that the school nurse be involved in district policy development that addresses the issue of delegation of care in the school setting.

The school nurse is responsible for using professional nursing judgment to determine the appropriate level of care needed for each student, including whether or not tasks can be delegated. Once the school nurse determines that a task can indeed be

delegated (based on the definition of delegation, guidelines provided by the Washington State nurse practice act, and assessment of the unique characteristics of the individual student needing nursing services), an appropriate delegatee must be chosen.

By definition, a delegated nursing service requires that the nurse train and supervise the delegatee and the health outcome of the student. The training must be documented. The documentation must reflect that the delegatee understands what needs to be done and demonstrates proficiency in performing the delegated task for each student. Ongoing and regular evaluation by the registered nurse is required in accordance with state, district, and/or school policy. The school nurse must take appropriate actions when the delegatee is unsafe in performing delegated tasks.

CONCLUSION:

SNOW supports appropriate delegation of nursing services in the school setting, based on the definition of delegation, guidelines provided by the nurse practice act, guidelines provided by the state school nurse consultant, and the nursing assessment of the unique needs of the individual student. Only registered nurses can delegate nursing care in the school setting. The school nurse shall be involved in the development of school district policy and procedures related to delegation of care, to promote an understanding of the complex legal and clinical issues that surround delegation of care.

The health, safety, and welfare of the student must be the primary consideration in any decision to delegate. The school nurse making such a decision must be familiar with applicable nursing standards, the state nursing practice act, and other applicable state and federal mandates. The school nurse must also be familiar with pertinent state education, public health and pharmacy laws and regulations.

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