



POSITION STATEMENT

School Nurse Role in Emergency Preparedness

HISTORY:

Emergencies include events that are natural or perpetrated by human error, events that occur accidentally or are the result of a deliberate act of violence. Schools have an obligation to be able to care for students, staff, and sometimes community members in the event of an emergency. School nurses represent a unique and vital perspective relative to the successful creation and implementation of emergency preparedness plans for schools.

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE:

Emergencies can occur without notice during any school day. These emergencies can occur within the school walls or beyond – both can impact schools. Natural emergencies include earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, or storms. Man-made emergencies include bioterrorism, radiation exposure, hazardous materials spills, transportation accidents, fires, civil disobedience, and terrorism. Even though emergencies occur suddenly and without warning, the outcome of the event is improved dramatically when there has been emergency preparedness planning. School administrators are responsible for developing an emergency response plan. In the event of an emergency, school officials, media, community members, fire, police, health officials, volunteer agencies, and government representatives may converge. To minimize the impact of an emergency, it is important to know the risks, assess the resources and training needs, and develop plans for response and recovery (Doyle & Loyacono, 2001). The school nurse has a vital role in each phase of emergency planning and management.

RATIONALE:

School nurses are strategically placed within school environments. School nurses are able to assess potential emergency risks and assess the effectiveness of emergency trainings and practice activities. They are on the front line when an emergency occurs. They respond to all serious adverse events that threaten the health, safety, or well being of a school. In particular, school nurses have unique knowledge of children with special health care needs and are of utmost importance in the planning and responding phases of emergency management. The role of school nurses places them in a strategic position to assist in the short-term and long-term recovery phase after an emergency has occurred. School nurses also play vital roles on teams that review and evaluate a school's response to an emergency.

Role of the School Nurse:

The school nurse has an important role before, during, and after an emergency.

Before an emergency occurs, the school nurse can serve on community-wide planning groups that assess the school's ability to manage an emergency, determine emergency plans, and participate in reviews and drills of these plans. The school nurse can be instrumental in identifying unique emergency preparedness needs for children with special needs.

During the disaster, it is critical to be knowledgeable about the emergency plan and the school nurse's role. The school nurse may be involved as a key source of information to the school and broader community, counselor to students, families, or staff, and provider of triage and direct hands-on care to victims of the emergency.

After the emergency, the school nurse has a unique perspective to share with teams working with students, parents, and school personnel and their reactions to the emergency. Support may include providing direct intervention or being the liaison between community resources and those in need. The school nurse also can offer a unique perspective when involved in the evaluation and revision of the emergency response plan.

The school nurse must also be aware of the effects of the emergency on her or his own personal and professional life. Awareness and action to address personal effects of the aftermath are critical for the ability to resume the demanding role of school nurse.

CONCLUSION:

SNOW promotes the position that school nurses can play a vital role in all phases of emergency preparedness in schools. The strategic position of the nurse within the school environment represents a vital resource to those planning for comprehensive emergency management for schools

Local, state, or community legislation relative to school emergency plans should also be considered when developing emergency plans. Factors such as the school nurse's assignment and caseload must also be considered when determining his/her active participation in emergency management. Continuous integration, coordination, and training of all school and community members are the keys to the reduction of injury and death in any school/community disaster.

Resources/References:

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