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# What do young people want from their school nursing service? A consultation to inform service development

The experiences of children and young people in their early and developing years are critical to health and educational outcomes, in that they set the course for adult life (Department of Health, 2011a). The Department of Health paper, *'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Update and Way Forward'* clearly identified school nurses and their teams as central to the delivery of the public health agenda through setting down strong foundations for good life chances and supporting children and young people in the choices they make about their health (Department of Health, 2011b). School nursing teams consist of specialist public health nurses, qualified staff nurses and health care assistants, who work in partnership with several primary and secondary schools to provide a service to children and young people. In England, the school nursing service is commissioned locally by public health professionals, within Local Authorities (LAs).

### Patient and public involvement

In public health, patient and public involvement (PPI) is "the active participation of patients, carers, community representatives and groups, and the public in how services are planned, delivered and evaluated" (NHS, 2008, p. 9). The basis for involving patients and the public with regard to commissioning healthcare services is to deliver real benefits, on the basis that by listening to those who use the services, and also those who do not, it is possible to develop more effective services (NHS, 2008).

Public and patient involvement during the service development stage can help healthcare professionals to understand the lifestyles and choices of the target population, so that the service can be designed in a way that is most appropriate and engaging (NHS, 2008).

In addition, involving service users in service development ensures that those, whose views may go unheard, such as hard-to-reach young people, are involved. Involving patients in all aspects of health is a government priority. *'Liberating the NHS'* (Department of Health, 2010) talks about; 'building partnerships for service changes and priorities'. Furthermore, the Marmot Review (2010) emphasised the need to; 'Ensure that schools, families and communities work in partnership to reduce the gradient in health, well-being and resilience of children and young people'.

### Young people involved

It is clear, therefore, that young people need to be actively involved in the development of the school nursing service, rather than seen solely as recipients of the service. However, despite this, services are often designed in isolation using a "top-down" approach (i.e., practitioner-driven), with little or no input from the service users (Thackeray & Neiger, 2000). Indeed, the British Youth Council (BYC) (2011) reviewed the existing literature regarding the school nursing service, and found a lack of research regarding the engagement of young people in the development and design of school nursing. This identified great potential for commissioners to actively seek the voice of young people with regards to the school nursing service and its future vision (BYC, 2011).

A broad consultation was therefore conducted with service users of the school nursing service in a Yorkshire town; including the views of children and young people, and parents and teachers, from both primary and secondary schools. The current paper describes one element of this consultation, which engaged 292 children and young people (CYP) aged 11 to 18. The aim

of the research was to replicate the BYC consultation, that is, to identify the thoughts and needs of the CYP regarding the role of school nurses in improving health in the local Borough; and to identify how school nurses' skills and resources can be used in the most effective way. The findings from the consultation will build on the existing literature and inform the development of school nursing services both locally and nationally.

## Method

An online survey was constructed using *SurveyMonkey.com*. Using the British Youth Council (2011) consultation as a framework, the survey consisted of quantitative questions about the school nursing service (these are available on request). In addition, one qualitative (free response) question was included to allow extra information to be derived. A further six questions collected equality monitoring information (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability etc.)

Ten local secondary schools (all with sixth forms) were sampled from (out of the total 17 mainstream schools in the Borough), using a random number generator in *Microsoft Office Excel (2007)*. The link to the survey was then shared with key people within these ten settings (e.g., Head teachers, pastoral staff, PSHE Leads) for dissemination amongst all CYP for completion.

At the end of the survey period, the data were downloaded into *Microsoft Office Excel (2007)*; frequency counts and percentages are reported for quantitative data, qualitative data were content analysed to identify themes.

## Results

A total of 292 young people aged 11 to 18 took part in the survey, which ran from January to March 2015. The mean age of participants was 13.3 years. Just over half of participants were female (54.6%), 107 were male (42.6%), 5 preferred not to say (5%) and 2 identified as transgender (0.8%). The majority of participants defined their sexual orientation as straight (80.2%). The majority of participants were White British (61.6%), although other ethnicities were represented; see Table 1.

Table 1. Ethnicity of respondents

Ethnicity	N (%)
White English/British	180 (61.6)
White Scottish	2 (0.7)
Gypsy Traveller	1 (0.3)
Polish	9 (3.1)
Latvian	1 (0.3)
Slavakian	4 (1.4)
Lithuanian	1 (0.3)
Other European	7 (2.4)
Black African	8 (2.7)
Black Caribbean	3 (1.0)
Chinese	3 (1.0)
Bangladeshi	1 (0.3)
Pakistani	23 (7.9)
Other Asian	7 (2.4)
Indian	2 (0.7)
Mixed - White and Black African	9 (3.1)
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	5 (1.7)
Mixed - White and Asian	5 (1.7)
No response	55 (18.8)

The majority of pupils did not consider themselves to be disabled (94%). Of those who did, their conditions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Impairments of respondents who identified as disabled

Impairments	N (%)
Mobility impairment (wheelchair user)	4 (8.2)
Learning disability	4 (8.2)
Sensory impairment - blind/visually impaired	2 (4.1)
Sensory impairment - deaf/hearing impaired	2 (4.1)
Long term illness/health condition	3 (6.1)
Mental health condition	2 (4.1)
Prefer not to say	37 (75.5)

At the beginning of the questionnaire, it was emphasised that school nurses were not first aiders and that they wore an NHS nurses' uniform. When asked "In the last school year, have you seen a school nurse around your school?" the responses were evenly split between *Yes* (36.6%), *No* (36.3%) and *Not sure* (27.1%). It could be assumed, however, that those who responded *Not sure* had not seen a school nurse; this would increase the percentage of those who had not seen a school nurse to 63.4%. When asked "Do you know the name of the school nurse who visits your school?" almost all of the pupils responded *No* (95.9%). When the pupils were asked "If you want to see a school nurse would you know what to do?" the majority responded *No* (57.7%).

When asked "In the last school year, have you visited a school nurse? (This is not your school's first aider, school nurses wear an NHS nurses' uniform)" the majority responded that they had not (77.9%); with 13% reporting that they were *not sure*. In total, 84 of the 85 pupils who had visited their school nurse responded, when asked "Thinking of the last time you visited a school nurse, which of the below best describes them? Select as many as apply". The majority of these pupils described their school nurse positively (see Table 3).

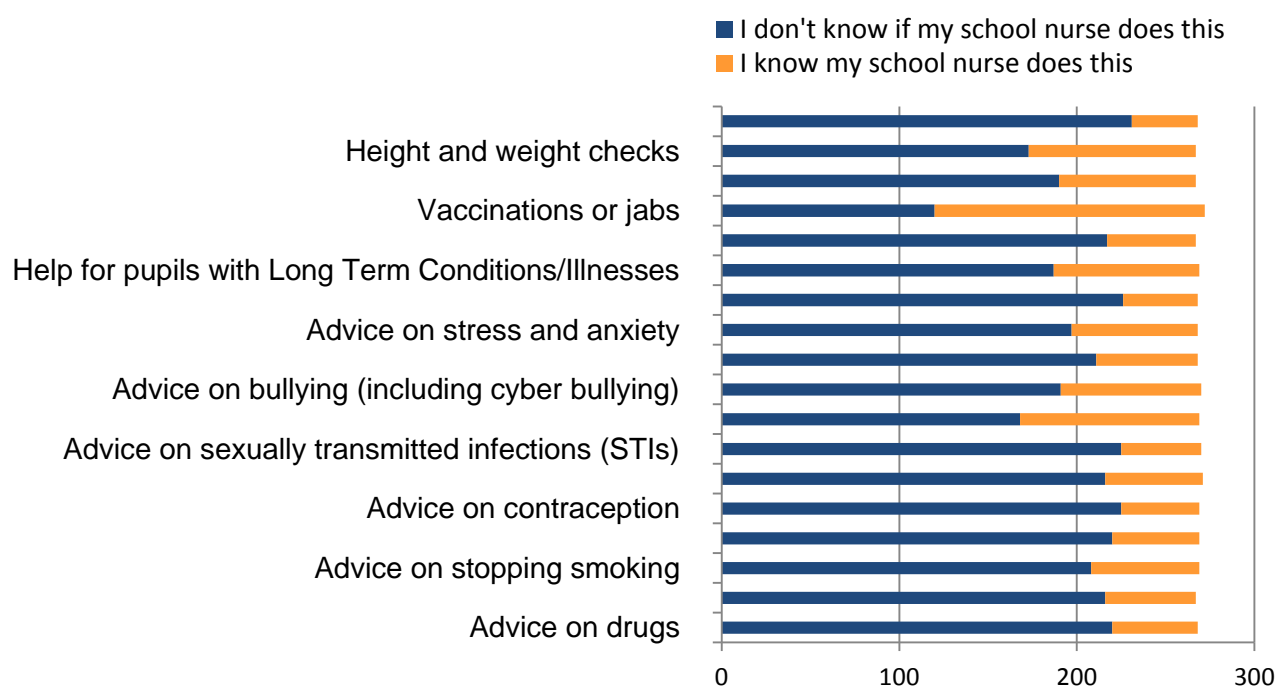
Table 3. Characteristics of the school nurse

	N (%)
Friendly	66 (78.6)
Listened to me	52 (61.9)
Approachable	39 (46.4)
Made me feel comfortable	30 (35.7)
Gave me lots of time to talk	23 (27.4)
Rushed me	7 (8.3)
Didn't treat me with respect	5 (6.0)
Made me feel uncomfortable	4 (4.8)
Didn't listen to me	4 (4.8)
Unapproachable	3 (3.6)
Unfriendly	2 (2.4)
None of the above	2 (2.4)

Of those who had visited a school nurse in the last year, three quarters found the advice given to them to be helpful (75%).

The pupils were given a list of possible services that the school nursing service could provide and were asked whether they knew the school nurse did this in their school or not. "Vaccinations or jabs" was the most commonly known service among pupils (N = 152) (Figure 2 below). There was poor knowledge among pupils around the rest of the services that school nurses could provide.

Figure 2. Awareness of school nursing services



From the same list, the pupils were asked if they thought the school nurse should offer these services. "Advice on healthy eating and weight management" was the most popular service (N = 206) followed closely by "Vaccinations or jabs" (N = 204) (Figure 15). "Counselling" was the least popular service (N = 121) closely followed by "Advice on relationships" (N = 145). Overall, the pupils were supportive of all the services listed (Figure 3, below).

The majority of pupils said they would prefer the school nurse to offer a mixture of both appointments and drop-ins (59.7%), as opposed to either appointments or drop-ins alone (23.3% and 17.1% respectively). When making an appointment, pupils would prefer to do this by visiting the school nurse's room; this option ranked highest, followed by: "Through staff at reception"; "Through a teacher"; "Email"; "Text messaging"; "Phone call". When the pupils were asked, "Where would you like to visit your school nurse?" the highest ranked option was "In School", followed second by, "At a doctor's surgery" then: "At a youth club"; "At home"; and "In a private area of a shopping centre". When asked when they would like to see their school nurse, the most preferred option was at "Break time", followed second by "During lessons" then: "Lunchtime"; "After school; "In

school holidays"; "At weekends".

In terms of communication, when pupils were asked "How would you like to find out about school nurses and the services offered?" the In terms of communication, when pupils were asked "How would you like to find out about school nurses and the services offered?" the highest ranked option was "Face-to-face e.g., in assemblies". This was followed by: "Leaflets"; "Posters"; "Student email"; "Social media"; "School planner"; then lastly "Text message".

There was one free response question, which asked for suggestions and comments as to what the school nursing service should provide. The qualitative data were content-analysed and three main themes emerged; unfortunately the characteristics of the respondents were not captured by *SurveyMonkey.com*.

### Access

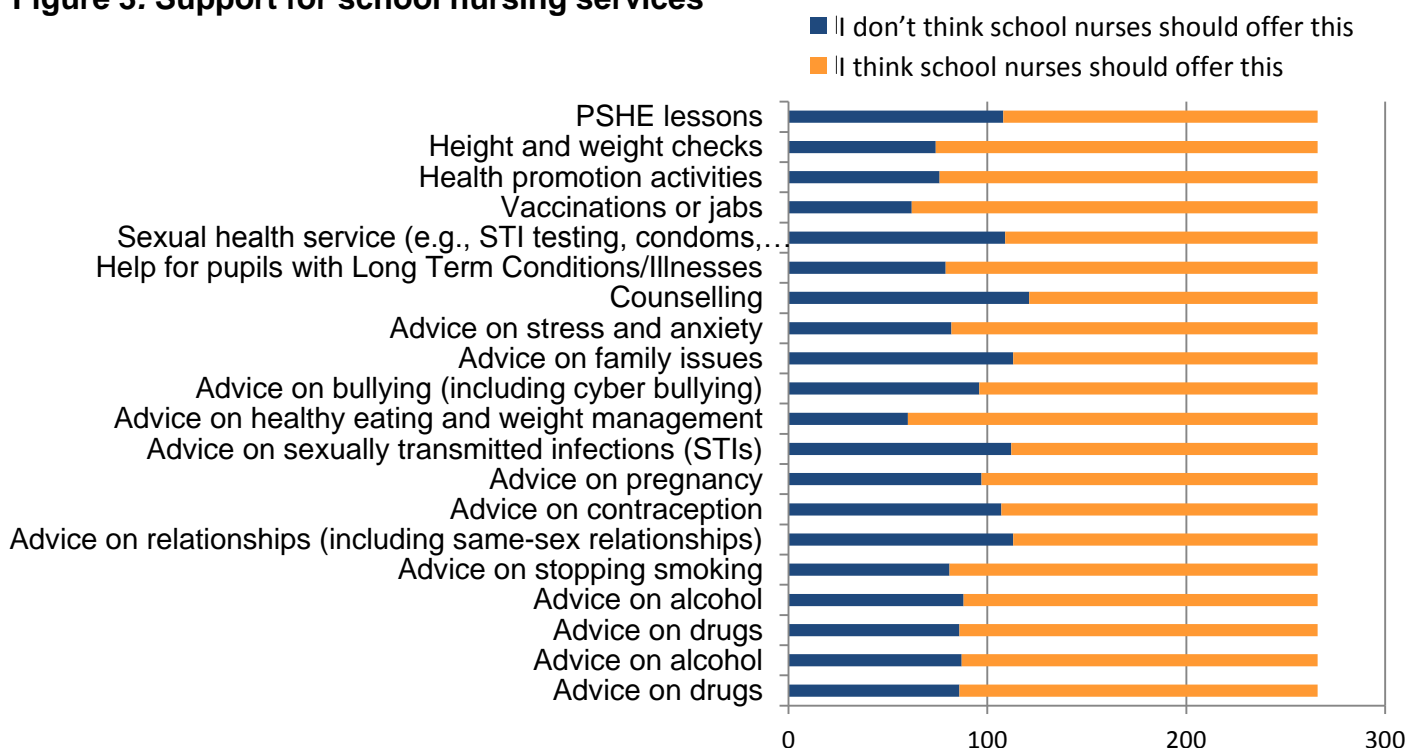
Pupils would like the school nurses to be available more around school and offer private access, for example:

*"They should be able to be reached privately and anonymously if wanted. If pupils don't want to speak face to face they should be able to talk over the phone or messages."*

*"Provide people with more private places"*

*"If it is something personal, it should always be private"*

**Figure 3. Support for school nursing services**



*"I think it would be good if she was in school every day so I could see her as soon as I need her"*

*"Maybe if they were around a bit more."*

*"You can talk to her all the time"*

*"I think the school nurse should offer appointments throughout a school day"*

*"I think that the school nurse should come in more"*

## Awareness

There was a general lack of awareness about who the school nurses are, for example:

*"We don't even know we have a school nurse"*

*"I have no clue who the school nurse is so I don't know what they cover"*

*"To know who she is"*

*"They should make themselves more known around school, so that pupils know they have the opportunity to go to the school nurse."*

*"To be more known around school"*

## Visibility

Pupils would like their school nurse to be more visible around school, for example:

*"They should appear more in around school."*

*"She/he [should] walk round at break time"*

*"They also never seem to never be around."*

*"Why can't I see them often"*

*"They could also make sure that people know that they are here I have only ever seen them in school when I got my jab done"*

## Recommendations

Pulling together the quantitative and qualitative data from the secondary school consultation, three key themes emerged from the children and young people who responded:

### 1. School nurses need to be visible and well-known in and around school

- Over half of the respondents (63%) had not seen or were not sure if they had seen a school nurse around their school in the last school year.
- Nearly all (96%) responded that they did not know the name of the school nurse who visits their school.
- Over half of the respondents (58%) would not know what to do if they wanted to see a school nurse.
- Only 29% of the young people had visited a school nurse in the last school year.

### 2. School nurses need to offer choice to young people in order to be accessible

- The majority of respondents would prefer a mixture of appointments and drop-ins.
- Young people preferred to visit the school nurse in school at break times but should still have the option to visit them at other places and times, with the most important thing to young people being privacy.
- Despite the rise of new technology among young people, they would prefer to make contact with their school nurse by visiting a designated school nurse room and seeing them face-to-face.
- The majority of respondents who had accessed their school nurse reported that they had a positive experience; 75% of young people said they thought the advice they were given was helpful.

### 3. School nurses need to offer a wide range of services and promote these face-to-face as well as using leaflets/posters

- Overall, there was a lack of awareness of what services school nurses could offer.
- The young people thought it would be helpful for school nurses to promote their services at assemblies, PSHE lessons and after school clubs.
- Face-to-face communication to promote the service was preferred over written communication.
- The top five services that respondents thought all school nurses should offer were: Advice on healthy eating and weight management; Vaccinations; Height and weight checks; Health promotion activities; and help for pupils with long term illnesses and conditions.

The findings of the current consultation corroborate those of the BYC (2011) report, whereby four key themes emerged from the CYP regarding the school nursing service:

1. School nurses need to be visible and well known amongst school-aged children and young people.
2. School nurses need to offer early help to support young people.
3. School nursing services need to offer choice to young people in order to be accessible and confidential.

4. Young people want to be able to offer their views about the service they receive.

These themes are also reported in *'Getting it right for children, young people and families'* (Department of Health, 2012), which also highlights the importance of understanding and considering the views of the parents/carers in the review and redesign of school nursing.

### Strengths and Limitations

As mentioned in the introduction, school nursing services are commissioned locally by the local Council. As such, different LAs have different school nursing services, from varying providers with various different models. A limitation of this research is therefore the extent to which it can be generalised to other LAs. However, the results from the BYC consultation were very similar, suggesting that the views are consistent across England.

Since the consultation was concerned with school nursing across schools, and not within individual schools, the survey failed to capture the distribution of pupils from the ten different schools. Thus, it may be that some schools had greater participation than others but we cannot tell. However, the random sampling method used to identify schools for recruitment adds a strength to the consultation, by reducing bias.

The mean age of respondents was 13.3 years, thus the sample was relatively young. This may have an effect on the types of services that students may have accessed the school nurse for and/or think that the school nurse should offer. The questions had a set time frame (i.e., last school year) to reduce the effect that the amount of time that a pupil had been attending a school would have on their use of the service. For example, whether they had been at the school five months or five years, the questions specifically referred to the last *school year*. As mentioned in the introduction, this article reports

only part of a wider consultation (including primary age children, as well as parents and teachers) and the totality will be considered when designing the new school nursing service.

### Conclusion

This consultation sought to explore secondary school children's experiences of their current school nursing service and views of what the priorities for school nursing should be, in a Yorkshire town.

The findings highlight key elements of improvement that can help shape the school nursing service model in order to deliver a service that: meets the needs of children and young people aged 11 to 18; a service that is visible, accessible and well-promoted. Engaging CYP in this way ensures they have a voice and enhances the likelihood of developing and delivering a service that is both relevant and effective.

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