

Hour-long modules guide teachers to a better understanding of health-related issues.

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Anne Simpson & Helen West

West Sussex school nurses teach the teachers

While the agenda of work for school nurses may have changed over the last hundred years, the importance of their work is in no way diminished; they are ideally placed to be the leading workforce in health education for our primary and secondary school age children.'

With these words, Professor J. D. Baum of Bristol University introduced the Amalgamated School Nurses' Association 1992 report on current school nurse practice (1). One of the conclusions and recommendations was as follows:

Schools and teaching staff, presently faced with the need to examine their own practice in the light of the introduction of the national curriculum, should recognise a valuable resource in their school nurse colleagues, and seek to incorporate her expertise into their efforts to establish health-promoting schools.

An under-used resource

However, data presented in the report also shows that fewer than 10% of the school nurses surveyed had a teaching certificate, although over 40% would like to receive training in health education. This supports the belief that school nurses form a potentially very valuable, but currently under-used, health education resource.

This is the background to the decision by health education workers and school nurses in West Sussex to collaborate in the production of a set of training and information packs to be used to train school staff on various childhood health issues.

Originally, individual school nurses had been responding to requests from teaching staff for more information by their own individual presentations, put together on an *ad hoc* basis.

Structuring the approach

However, at a school nurse meeting in January 1992, it was decided that the needs for training and information could be better met by a more structured approach. The aim of the resulting project is to boost the competence and confidence of the adults who work with children by increasing their understanding of child health and assisting them to assess emergency situations and respond effectively to them.

Over the following two years, more school nurses became involved in writing and piloting the hour-long teaching modules. Many health and education professionals, representatives of local and national organisations, businesses and self-help groups gave generous support and advice. This has truly been an inter-agency project with funding coming from Mid-Downs Health Authority, the former SW Thames Regional Health Authority, and private enterprise.

Janice Spence, Senior Health Education Adviser for Schools and Young People, has co-ordinated the project with help from the Consumer Affairs Department of Mid-Downs Health Authority and the Research Unit, which has evaluated the modules from information gained as a result of piloting workshops.

An unexpected result of this collaboration

'This has truly been an inter-agency project.'

The authors: Anne Simpson teaching the teachers, Helen West taking a break!



has been increasing contact between the school nurses and the Health Education Unit. This has included joint training sessions, regular planning meetings and a closer working relationship generally.

The modules

Modules currently available in the Child Health Care series are on Asthma, Epilepsy, Diabetes, Infection Control, Basic Resuscitation and HIV/AIDS. They are designed for use by trainers working with teachers, school welfare assistants, residential care staff and youth leaders. They may, with minimal changes, also be useful in helping parents and possibly older children to a greater understanding of health-related issues which may affect them. It is recommended that, if possible, a suitable health professional, such as a school nurse, attends the session, either as trainer or consultant, to deal with any questions arising which may be beyond the scope of the information presented in the modules.

The standardised format enables users to move easily from one pack to another. Additional resources, such as resuscitation models or examples of asthma inhalers, which are required for particular sessions, are listed in the preparation section at the front of each pack. There are also master copies of appropriate handouts and evaluation sheets for use if desired.

The structure of the training sessions allows for considerable flexibility so that the needs of particular groups may be met. Trainers are advised to collate certain local information and statistics which will be helpful in their presenta-

tion. National statistics are included where appropriate, with information on national avenues of support. Most modules include a video, which expands on the trainer's script and offers a change of pace during the session.

School nurses may be invited to present a session during a staff meeting or as part of an in-service training day. Each module takes around an hour to present, and we have found that even staff that felt they were already well-informed have found them helpful. As a school nurse, Anne found the idea of training teachers quite threatening at first, but having such thoroughly-prepared and easily-used resources was very helpful and gave her confidence.

Asthma

The Asthma module is particularly popular. With at least one in ten children affected, everyone working with this age group will have to cope with an attack at some time. The National Asthma Campaign's video *Every Little Breath* is included in the pack, and the session includes a demonstration of inhalers and spacers. Trigger factors, preventative treatment and emergency care are discussed and the possible implications on children's lifestyles are explored. Most participants have found this session extremely helpful.

Epilepsy

Epilepsy affects approximately four children in a thousand and the condition is still poorly understood by many lay-people. In addition to information on triggers, management and safety, the Epilepsy module provides an oppor-

tunity for dispelling myths and addressing fear and prejudice. The British Epilepsy Association/Ciba Geigy video, *Adventure Club*, is included. A short, specially-prepared video made with footage supplied by Parke-Davis showing examples of seizures is also provided at the request of teachers attending our pilot sessions.

Diabetes

The Diabetes module also includes a particularly attractive, specially-produced video funded by Novo-Nordisk, based on an original idea by a specialist Diabetes Nurse, which explains the condition in simple terms. The emotional and social impact of diabetes on the child and family are explored in some detail. Management, supervision and emergency care are also discussed, and common misconceptions about the condition are addressed.

Resuscitation

The Basic Resuscitation module, because of its participatory nature, may require a longer time-slot to allow everyone to try out the basic skills. The British Heart Foundation's *Heart-start* pack, including a training video, is provided. This session is quite active and is perhaps better suited to a training day than an after-school meeting.

Infection & HIV/AIDS

Outbreaks of infection among the population of a school or other institution can attract unfavourable publicity and considerably disrupt normal routines. The Infection Control module aims to raise awareness around the issue of the transmission of infections and promote understanding of the concept of standard hygiene precautions. The HIV/AIDS module contains similar elements and looks at attitudes and values in a non-threatening way. Both sessions include activities in small groups to enable participants to review current practice in their own place of work and assess whether changes should be made.

Take-up

The modules have been well received in all the schools that have hosted a presentation, and everyone concerned with the production of the modules hopes that independent schools and residential facilities in our area will also be interested. This could become a source of additional income, in addition to improving

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For further information about the packs, please talk to Janice Spence, Senior Health Education Adviser, Mid-Downs Health Authority (0444 441666, ext. 2164).

children's health.

In Mid-Downs Health Authority, all school nurse bases have been supplied with the complete library of modules, so offering maximum freedom to provide training appropriate to the needs of the children and the schools' schedules. Packs are also being offered to schools as a reference source. The content of modules will be frequently reviewed so that any changes can be incorporated in newly-printed editions.

Demand for these sessions is increasing as word spreads among staff groups. The school nurses involved feel that the time spent delivering them is very worthwhile. Although the results in terms of child health are difficult to evaluate, a more confident and competent approach to health issues must be beneficial.

Future plans and availability

Possible modules which could be considered for development in the future are Eating Disorders, Attention Deficit Disorder (hyperactivity), Sickle Cell Disease, and Thalassaemia, if funding should become available.

The cost of a complete library of modules is £259.00 which gives a saving on buying the packs singly. Individual packs are as follows: Asthma £59.95, Basic Resuscitation £59.95, Diabetes £59.95, Epilepsy £59.95, HIV/AIDS £44.95, Infection Control £44.95, plus VAT and postage. They are available from Merlin Communications (UK) Ltd., 37A Market Place, Cirencester, Glos. GL7 2NX (0285 641851).

Reference

1. Fletcher K. & Balding J. (1992). *School Nurses do it in Schools!* Huntingdon, Cambs.: Amalgamated School Nurses' Association (0487 840610).

SCHOOL NURSES: A PROFESSIONAL ENQUIRY

**School Nurses do it
in Schools!**

TRENDS IN SCHOOL NURSING PRACTICE

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