School nurses do it in schools!

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The main findings

There are set out in more detail in the report, but here is a summary:

- The workforce is a mature and stable one which is well qualified but undergraded, with limited opportunities for further development. This is despite their professional responsibilities within the fields of child health surveillance (including child protection), health interviews, health education and the teaching of student nurses.
- Education and preparation for practice for these nurses shows an increase in the numbers who hold the Certificate in School Nursing, but with disagreement with the content and length of courses.
- A slight downward trend in the numbers of schools and pupils served by each nurse is seen, together with the appearance of a small number of school nursing teams, but numbers of nurses who work part-time are rising.
- Contact with children with special educational needs is reported by nearly half of the nurses.
- The survey shows an increasing use of health interventions with pupils, more involvement in child care proceedings, and an increasing responsibility for the teaching of students.
- The school nurse's role in health education is emphasised, the implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act being reflected in their increased involvement in this subject.
- The data also includes numbers of school nurses conducting nurseries, immunisation, family planning and "drop-in" clinics.

Recommendations

Education

The UKCC must recognise the scope and breadth of the work undertaken by the school nurse of the 1990s and validate suitable training courses to equip her to do it.

Note should be taken of the skills needed to carry out efficient health surveillance and effective health interviews, offering pupils opportunities to identify their own individual health needs and empowering them to address the consequences of their own health-related behaviour.

Increased emphasis should be placed on child protection issues in future courses, and the need for evaluation and research techniques highlighted.

Increasing use should be made of school nurse tutors who have, themselves, had experience in school nursing practice.

Nursing services

Employing Authorities must recognise the potential of good school nursing services, the status of the school nurse, and the need for realistic communication.

The absence of effective policy guidelines at national level leaves managers with little on which to base their school nursing services save historical and now largely outdated practices. Many of the statistical returns purporting to record the work of the school nurse do not give an accurate picture.

A statement from the Department of Health, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, defining aims and objectives for the improvement of health services for schoolchildren and laying down guidelines for good practice in this field, is long overdue. An ideal opportunity for such an initiative presents itself in the current consultation on The Health of the Nation (4).

Health education

Schools and teaching staff, presently faced with the need to examine their own practice in the light of the area of school nurse education, training which is mandatory to practice is essential.

References

2. UKCC, 1990. The Report of the Post Registration Education and Practice Project. UKCC.