



National Association of School Nurses

ISSUE BRIEF

School Health Nursing Services Role in Health Care

DELEGATION OF CARE IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

INTRODUCTION

All children and adolescents coming to school deserve an educational environment that motivates them to achieve learning success. Many of these children also have a wide variety of health, psychosocial, and learning challenges. Meeting the health needs of students is particularly challenging within the educational system due to the increased number and complexity of individual student health needs, high nurse-to-student ratios, lack of dedicated funding, and the work of merging the missions of education and health.

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) has recommended school nurse-to-student ratios to assure the health and safety for student demographics with varied health acuity levels. However many schools are staffed with school nurses well below these recommendations (Proctor, Lordi & Sanger, 1993; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Therefore, school nurses often find it necessary to utilize the process of delegation whereby the school nurse can delegate nursing tasks or functions to unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) to support the individualized health care plan developed by the school nurse.

BACKGROUND

Delegation is a term that is not used exclusively in nursing and while the general idea may be similar in other fields (for example: medicine, education, business) it has a unique place and meaning in the practice of nursing. There are several factors that must be understood in order to use delegation safely and effectively in the education setting. The school nurse must understand the state laws, as well as the rules and regulations, that govern nursing practice, the concept of delegation in the nursing process, the Standards of Professional School Nursing Practice, and the Code of Ethics for Nursing.

Nursing practice is governed by professional and regulatory agencies. Professional nurses are held accountable to professional standards and corresponding state laws. Professional agencies set standards of practice and determine the scope of practice for nurses. According to the American Nurses Association (ANA, 1998), standards are authoritative statements by which the nursing profession that:

- describes the responsibilities for which its practitioners are accountable
- provides direction for professional nursing practice
- defines the nursing profession's accountability to the public
- defines the client outcome for which nurses are responsible

Regulatory agencies determine the minimum level of preparation for licensure, enforces the agreed upon scope of practice set forth in the Nurse Practice Act, and enforces the laws in order to protect the public. (Most are also empowered to pass rules and regulations that provide the specific detail not contained in the nurse practice acts.) Because not all state nursing practice acts rules and regulations allow delegation, it is essential that school nurses understand their state Nurse Practice Act. It is imperative that the school nurse be knowledgeable about these guidelines and limitations in their respective states. The degree of detail found in state guidelines for delegation of care will vary. Some states and territories specifically restrict procedures that can be delegated in their guidelines, whereas others do not address delegation at all. Guidelines often, but not always, include language that specifically refers to the supervision of delegated nursing tasks. The school nurse's decision to delegate must always be in line with the applicable state Nurse Practice Act.

Delegation is often looked at in isolation but it is an integral part of the nursing process. "The nursing process encompasses all significant actions taken by nurses in providing care to all clients, and forms the foundation for clinical decision making"(ANA, 1998, p.3). Standards of Care are comprised of the six steps of the nursing process:

Standards of Care (NASN & ANA, 2001)

Standard 1	Assessment The school nurse collects client data.
Standard 2	Diagnosis The school nurse analyzes the assessment data in determining nursing diagnoses.
Standard 3	Outcome Identification The school nurse identifies expected outcomes individualized to the client.
Standard 4	Planning The school nurse develops a plan of care/action that specifies interventions to attain expected outcomes.
Standard 5	Implementation The school nurse implements the interventions identified in the plan of care/action.
Standard 6	Evaluation The school nurse evaluates the client's progress toward attainment of outcomes.

Delegation occurs when the school nurse cannot implement the interventions (Standard 5) identified in the plan of care. It is not appropriate for the nurse to delegate any other portion of the nursing process (Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) because these require the skill and knowledge of the professional nurse.

In the school setting, most often this delegation is to Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP). In 1992, the American Nurses Association stated the term *UAP* applies to an unlicensed individual who is trained to function in an assistive role to the licensed nurse in the provision of patient/client activities as delegated by the nurse. The ANA position paper on the utilization of a UAP by the registered nurse (RN) states:

1. It is the nursing profession that determines the scope of nursing practice.
2. It is the nursing profession that defines and supervises the education, training, and utilization for any UAP involved in providing direct patient care.
3. It is the RN who is responsible and accountable for the provision of nursing practice (i.e., physicians cannot prescribe nursing practice.)
4. It is the RN who supervises and determines the appropriate utilization of any UAP involved in providing direct patient care.
5. It is the purpose of UAP to enable the professional nurse to provide nursing care for the patient.

In schools a UAP may be the health aide, teacher, classroom aides, educational assistants, secretary, or anyone who accepts delegation from the school nurse and is not licensed by the State Board of Nursing.

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, p. 11; NASSNC, 2000). Delegation presumes that the delegator has greater knowledge, experience, and judgment than the delegate, and that the delegated task is only a subcomponent of the total student care process. In delegating, the school nurse uses professional judgment to decide what nursing care may be delegated and to whom. There are several important concepts of delegation in the nursing process that need to be understood.

- Delegation is to a selected person for a specific task in a selected situation. A specific skill is taught for a specific child. Each decision to delegate is an individual issue.
- While non-nurses, such as school principals, may suggest which nursing acts may be delegated, it is the school nurse who ultimately decides the appropriateness of the delegation.
- The UAP cannot re-delegate a delegated task to another UAP to perform.

Several professional organizations outline guidelines to assist the school nurse in the decision-making related to the delegation of care (ANA, 1994; NASSNC, 2000; NASN, 2002). The school nurse should approach delegation decision-making with careful consideration for the health and safety of the student. Using a guided decision making process will help school nurses articulate their judgment to those non-nurses who may not agree with their decision. One of the guidelines developed by the ANA (1997) is the Five Rights of Delegation.

1. The Right Task
2. The Right Person
3. The Right Direction
4. The Right Supervision
5. The Right Circumstances

Questions that should be addressed are:

1. Determination of the task, procedure, or function that is to be delegated. Is the procedure reasonably routine with a reasonably predictable outcome?
2. Staff availability. Who is available to do the nursing task, at the required time? Is there enough trained staff available?
3. Assessment of the potential delegatee's competency. What kind of training has this UAP had? Is the UAP able to understand the limitations of this delegation? Is this a reliable person? Will he or she seek appropriate help? Will he or she do the appropriate documentation? What are his or her other responsibilities during the time the delegated task is performed?
4. Consideration of the level of supervision available and a determination of the level and method of supervision required assuring safe performance. How much initial and ongoing supervision does this procedure for this specific student require? How will the school nurse document and assure that adequate training and supervision has occurred? By what method and how frequently does the school nurse need to assess for the student's safety and appropriate outcome?
5. Assessment of the client needs including age and vulnerability. Is this child particularly vulnerable due to age, developmental level, cognitive abilities, gender or special health issue?
6. Consideration of the environment in which the delegated task will occur. Is it conducive (safe) for the delegated activity?

Inherent in the decision to delegate is the requirement that the school nurse must supervise the UAP. The ANA defines supervision as "the active process of directing, guiding, and influencing the outcome of an individual performance of an activity." In addition, many State Nurse Practice Acts define supervision by the RN. Supervision is generally categorized as on-site (the nurse physically present or immediately available while the activity is being performed), or off-site (the nurse has the ability to provide direction through various means of written and verbal communications). A specific amount of time will depend upon the abilities of the UAP, training, and type and number of delegated nursing care tasks. It is the nurse's responsibility to use professional judgement to make decisions related to the amount, frequency, and type of supervision needed.

The ANA Code of Ethics (1985) probably best sums up the delegation process for the school nurse.

"The nurse exercises informed judgment and uses individual competency and qualifications as criteria in seeking consultation, accepting responsibilities, and delegating nursing activities to others." "...Inasmuch as the nurse is accountable for the quality of nursing care rendered to clients, nurses are accountable for the delegation of nursing care activities to other health workers. Therefore, the nurse must assess individual competency in assigning selected components of nursing care to other nursing service personnel. The nurse should not delegate to any member of the nursing team a function for which that person is not prepared or qualified. Employer policies or directives do not relieve the nurse of accountability for making judgments about the delegation of nursing care activities."

RATIONALE

In order to experience success in learning, children and adolescents have and will continue to have health needs that must be met in the educational setting. School nurses have the expertise to meet the health needs of children. Using the nursing process school nurses develop individual health plans for students. Delegation of nursing tasks to a UAP can be a safe and effective way to perform some of the nursing interventions identified in the individual health plan. It is the school nurse's responsibility and her or his authority to decide which nursing services may be delegated within the school setting, when allowed by state law, regulations, and/or guidelines.

ROLE OF THE SCHOOL NURSE

The role of the nurse in the school setting is to assess the health needs of the child and to coordinate with staff, family, health care providers, and community agencies in order to provide a comprehensive school health program that facilitates the maximum educational opportunity for the student. This means the school nurse is responsible for using professional nursing judgment to determine the appropriate level of care needed, to determine the appropriate level of staff needed to provide this care, and to ensure that delegated nursing care to a student in the school setting is safely performed and supervised. The school nurse must know how delegation is addressed in the State Nurse Practice Act, understand the professional and ethical standards related to nursing, and utilize a sound decision-making process for delegation decisions. It is also imperative that the school nurse articulate his or her knowledge and decision-making process to those who may not be familiar with delegation, especially as it is defined and applied by the profession of nursing.

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July 2004