Our Journey to Neverland:
Nursing Leaders Helping School Nurses Improve Student Health

Judy Norris Himes, MSN, RN, NE-BC, Judy Dillon, MSN, MA, RN, Kim Fields, ASN, RN, Department of Nursing, Penn State Hershey Medical Center
Jody R. McCullough, PRO Wellness Center, Penn State College of Medicine

Introduction
Nursing leadership and Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center worked with school nurses to complete state required health assessments for kindergarten through high school students.

Results of a comprehensive needs assessment identified that 80% of the 4,850 students at the school district confronted financial difficulties in their home environments.

Additional data from County Health Rankings and Roadmaps demonstrated the presence of health vulnerabilities compared to statewide data. Vulnerabilities included the proportion of children living in single parent households and poverty; high rates of obesity, smoking, and teen birth rates; uninsured families; and lower proportions of primary care physicians and dentists.

Nursing Intervention
Over 100 nurses from the medical center and seven personnel from the PRO Wellness Center partnered with 12 school nurses from seven schools to complete 3,105 screenings in two days. Vision, hearing, height, weight and scoliosis evaluations were conducted. Health assessments for growth, vision, hearing and scoliosis are required by Article XIV of the Pennsylvania School Code. The health assessments identified children who were overweight and/or obese, were in need of glasses, needed follow up hearing evaluations, or had the diagnosis of scoliosis.

In addition, Penn State Hershey PRO Wellness Center tested a revised body mass index (BMI) screening letter. This letter provides a more in-depth explanation of the health risks associated with a higher BMI percentile—its meaning and resources to help families.

Results and Conclusions
This initiative not only revealed significant health and social issues in the school children but also allowed school nurses to move beyond screening assessments that previously were yearlong projects. The school nurses could now spend time focusing on direct care for their students.

Childhood obesity was above national levels for this school district with 41.48% of students found to be overweight or obese.

Also, among parents of overweight or obese children who received the revised letter intended to take action compared to those receiving the standard letter.

Findings from the school assessments are being used for next steps.

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The following activities are planned:

• The PRO Wellness Center will return to the school district with customized action plans and programs.
• Submit the finalized letter to the Pennsylvania Department of Health for approval and adoption by school districts.
• The Nursing Leadership Team will return to the school district in 2013. They will be joined by faculty from Ophthalmology and Audiology; students from Penn State School of Nursing; audiology students from Bloomsburg University of PA; and a Penn State research team for hearing loss in adolescents.

Project Receives Community Benefit Award

Medical Center Staff Partners with School Nurses for Student Health Promotion

Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center was recognized along with two PA hospitals by the Hospital & HealthSystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) for the Community Benefit Award. Each year HAP honors innovation, creativity and commitment to patient care through an annual Achievement Awards program, which showcases hospital and health system best practices. In 2013, PSHMC was among 19 winners selected from 131 entries.

References


Contact Information

Judy Norris Himes, MSN, RN, NE-BC
Penn State Hershey Medical Center
Department of Nursing, 401 HMC
500 University Drive, P.O. Box 850
Hershey, PA 17033
jhimes1@hmc.psu.edu

Birth and cancer.