

Chapter 10

Employee Health and Workplace Wellness

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Setting up a School Employee Wellness Program in your School

School nurses can play a vital role in promoting the health and wellness of all school staff. The optimal physical and mental health of school employees is essential to an effective educational program. Absent or poorly functioning employees cannot support quality learning for students and can lead to increased healthcare costs. School personnel who want to encourage students to live healthy lifestyles will be more successful if they can model healthy behaviors. In this way, wellness programs and health promotion efforts for the staff benefit the students as well. As the health expert in the school, the nurse can offer expertise for coordination of some health services for staff as well as for students. Taking care of health needs and educating the faculty and staff can help make the nurse's job easier, as he or she develops relationships and educates staff about the nurse's role with the students as well.

The Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA) have established seven benchmarks of success for a "Well Workplace" that are worth considering. These "Seven Cs" are:

1. **Capturing senior level support** – The support of the principal and school district leaders will be critical to the success of a wellness program.
2. **Creating cohesive wellness teams** – Involve key staff members from all levels throughout the school, including Parent Teacher Association.
3. **Collecting data to drive health efforts** – Comprehensive programming should be based on the actual and perceived needs of the school community.
4. **Crafting an operating plan** – After data has been collected, strategically planning the program with key staff members will provide focus and organization. Establishing goals for the program, as well as for individuals, will assist with planning.
5. **Choosing appropriate interventions** – Based on collected data, implement programs that will encourage behavior change as needed and new knowledge and skills.
6. **Creating a supportive environment** – Positive changes in health behavior are more likely when the leaders in the work environment are supportive and staff works together cohesively to achieve health goals.
7. **Consistently evaluating outcomes** – As with any other endeavor, evaluation of the outcomes of specific goals will provide necessary feedback for future program planning and implementation, as well as a measurement tool for staff members to evaluate their individual progress toward health (adapted from the Wellness Councils of America at welcoa.org).

Potential Benefits of School Employee Wellness Programs

- Decreased employee absenteeism
- Lower health care and insurance costs
- Increased employee retention
- Improved employee morale
- Fewer work-related injuries
- Fewer worker compensation and disability claims
- Attractiveness to prospective employees
- Positive community image
- Increased productivity
- Increased motivation to teach about health
- Increased motivation to practice healthy behaviors
- Healthy role models for students

Employee wellness programs provide staff with information and experiences that promote an understanding of good health and its benefit to a person's quality of life. Schools and school districts should develop their staff wellness programs based on the needs of the community and involve school nurses in planning. School health personnel can conduct surveys and/or questionnaires about the types of activities the staff would enjoy and find beneficial. Wellness programs and classes can be offered during, before or after school hours, and they can include parents and other members of the school community.

Wellness programs can take the form of classes, support groups, health fairs, individual and team health challenges, health screenings, educational materials provided in staff lounges, health newsletters and one-on-one counseling. Programs that might be developed and offered include:

- **Personal health and fitness** – connection between physical fitness and wellness, ways to increase physical activity in daily life.
- **Disease prevention and control** – education about how to prevent communicable diseases, handwashing and standard precautions, adult immunizations, importance of routine health screenings, prevention and care of common conditions affected by lifestyle (hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, etc.).
- **Consumer health** – skills such as maximizing health insurance benefits, healthcare utilization and communicating effectively with healthcare providers.
- **Environmental health** – understanding the effects of the environment on health, dangers of secondhand smoke, pesticides, etc.
- **Nutrition and healthy eating** – benefits of healthy eating, how to read labels, connection between diet and disease risk, weight management tips and tools.
- **Safety and injury prevention** – use of personal protective equipment, basic first aid and CPR.
- **Prevention of substance use and abuse** – smoking cessation, referral to community programs.
- **Mental and emotional health/stress management** – stress and anger management techniques, stress-related health risks and support groups.

Parents and PTA members can be valuable allies in this effort, as they have a vested interest in the health of the teachers and staff. Remember as programs are planned that the term "faculty" usually refers to teachers; address "staff" in your memorandums and activities so that custodial staff, cafeteria workers, administrative assistants and even bus drivers are involved. These ideas have been successfully planned and implemented by experienced school nurses in school systems all over the country. Information in Chapter 9 of this manual also can help the school nurse sponsor and plan a health fair. Discuss these ideas with the principal, and then be creative. Share what works well with school nurse colleagues.

Consumer Health

- Find out what health benefits are available to employees in the system, so you can adequately counsel them (i.e., sick leave, maternity leave, mental health benefits).
- Start a mini-health information library in your office with books and health-related DVDs (maybe some of your nursing texts) which might help staff look up information pertinent to themselves or their families, find current articles related to health issues for children and adults, access relaxation tapes and visit health Web sites.
- Offer individual health counseling to help employees with a new diagnosis or chronic health problem negotiate the healthcare system more effectively.
- Supply guest speakers on health-related topics. One school system invited a local dermatologist to speak on sun-related skin damage and skin cancers. The doctor provided a mini-screening clinic for concerned employees.
- Do a “health-tip-of-the-month” sent by email to all staff. You might even do a health quiz of the month with the winner receiving a healthy “prize” (i.e., running socks, basket of apples).
- Research illnesses or prescribed medications for staff and show them reputable Web sites and how to search for accurate medical information for themselves on the Internet.

Disease Prevention and Control

- Offer your nursing services by implementing health screenings, such as blood pressure checks.
- Offer to come in an hour early or stay late one day a month to monitor blood pressures for the staff, giving them documentation to take back to their healthcare provider. This is also a great way to get to know your fellow employees on an individual basis.
- Some school districts have been able to bring a mobile mammogram van to the school annually to make it easier for staff to have this important test done.
- See if your school health insurance company will set up a screening program for cholesterol, glucose, etc., for the staff.
- Review standard precautions and classroom infection control measures with the staff each year.
- Coordinate with your local health department or hospital to provide vaccines or other health screenings.
- These activities might be offered at cost to the employees or, in some cases, may be free.
- Immunizations – assess whether employees are up to date on their immunizations and provide education on which vaccines are needed in adulthood.

Adult Vaccine Resources

Recommended Adult Immunization Schedule – Centers for Disease Control

cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/easy-to-read/adult.html

cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/adult.html

Summary of Recommendations for Adult Immunizations – Immunization Action Coalition

immunize.org/catg.d/p2011.pdf

Vaccine Information for Healthcare Professionals – Immunization Action Coalition

immunize.org/catg.d/p2017.pdf

Health Observances Calendar

School nurses can use health observances for students and staff in planning bulletin boards, newsletters, employee health classes and health education focus areas. The following resources provide comprehensive information about National Health Observances and related links.

Healthfinder.gov – US Department of Health and Human Services

healthfinder.gov/nho

Nutrition and Healthy Eating

- Provide information on reading nutrition labels and the importance of calcium, fiber, fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Advocate for healthy snack machines and drinking water in the staff lounges. Post nutritional information on vending machines showcasing healthier items more prominently.
- Encourage staff to eat a healthy breakfast.
- Organize a weight loss program or support group, walking group before or after school, and/or Weight Watchers at Work group. Make it fun with group goals and recognition of successes. Post BMI charts. Identify healthy ways to eat out.
- Host monthly healthy potlucks and recipe exchange.

Personal Health and Fitness

- Ask staff to complete a clinic emergency card, and make sure these cards are updated annually or as needed. It is important that you are aware of any health problems that may arise at school and have an emergency contact name and number for the employees at your school. Note: Employee Health Information Cards need to be kept in a secure location in accordance with HIPAA rules (refer to Chapter 1).
- Offer staff inservice programs during faculty meetings and teacher workdays. These programs could focus on health-related issues for themselves or the students. CPR and first aid classes may be offered during preplanning week, workdays or after school hours.
- Start a monthly health newsletter with articles about upcoming illness seasons, available vaccines, new health information, staff and faculty success stories, etc.
- Maintain a staff health bulletin board in a lounge or in the health office, with up-to-date health information, pamphlets and classes available in your area.
- Keep basic supplies for staff in the clinic such as Tylenol®, Advil®, Tampax® and Tums®. The PTA can often help with collection.
- Plan a health fair for the staff. Invite American Cancer Society and other local groups to bring information on breast self-exam, testicular self-exam, smoking cessation programs and many other good health practices.
- Recommend ways to add physical activity to lifestyle behaviors in ways that are easily achievable and measurable.
- Encourage staff to use the school track or gym to increase their physical activity.
- Raffle off a pedometer, publicize a “10,000 Steps to Health” plan and offer a 30-day walking challenge with group walks to increase steps.

Pregnancy Care

Expecting mothers and fathers staffed at the school may be concerned about exposure to illnesses in the school environment. You may provide resources about the following:

- Childhood illnesses, their symptoms and effects on the unborn child
- Medical care and vaccinations for expecting parents
- Prevention and causes of birth defects
- Maintaining a healthy pregnancy with diet, exercise and routine clinic visits
- Myths and truths about pregnancy

Pregnancy Resources

Guidelines for Vaccinating Pregnant Women – CDC

cdc.gov/vaccines/pregnancy/hcp/guidelines.html

Pregnancy Complications – March of Dimes

marchofdimes.com/pnhec/188.asp

WEBTREATS, Pregnancy – American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

acog.org/About_ACOG/ACOG_Departments/Resource_Center/WEBTREATS_Pregnancy

Find a Pregnancy Resource Center Near You

findpregnancyhelp.com/georgia.html

Safety and Injury Prevention

- Familiarize yourself with your school district's employee accident reports so they can be completed accurately and the employee can be adequately compensated if a workman's compensation benefit is needed.
- Assess the school environment for potential safety hazards as well as work-related illnesses and injuries. Monitor these issues on a regular basis, and provide documentation to the principal.
- Provide mini-sized first aid kits (gloves, bandaids, 4x4s) to each classroom.
- Provide information on defensive driving courses, car seat safety. Invite a SafeKids volunteer to check employees infant and child car seats. For more information visit usa.safekids.org.
- Coordinate training to be a heart-safe school by visiting choa.org/medical-services/cardiac-care/project-save-program.

Stress Management

- Work with the PTA and offer mini-massages or other services during Teacher Appreciation Week.
- Teach a class or provide information on time management, benefits of getting enough sleep and exercise, meditation techniques.
- Invite speakers for teacher workdays on conflict resolution, family relationships, and effective communication skills.

Resources

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality – US Department of Health and Human Services

guideline.gov/browse/by-topic.aspx

A to Z – Index Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/az

Fruits and Veggies, More Matters

fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Georgia Department of Public Health – Work Healthy Georgia

dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/WHGAtoolkit_9.pdf

Health Central

healthcentral.com

Medscape

medscape.com

National Association for Health and Fitness

physicalfitness.org

National Healthy Worksite Program – CDC

cdc.gov/nationalhealthyworksite/index.html

Quick Guide to Healthy Living – Healthfinder.gov

healthfinder.gov

School Staff Wellness Programs – e-How Mom

ehow.com/list_6578663_school-staff-wellness-programs.html

Wellness Council of America

welcoa.org

Wellness Junction

wellnessjunction.com

Women’s Health – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/women