



School Nurses Assess and Address Social Determinants

School nurses work with students and families in their neighborhoods and homes addressing social determinants such as access to care, safe and healthy environments/neighborhoods, and access to healthy food. As trusted members of the education and health community, school nurses address disparities in health every day.

Educating and empowering families

Connie, a middle school nurse, has noticed a major barrier to appropriate mental health care for students is a lack of parent/guardian awareness once a student has been identified to be in need and lacked help from anyone to be persistent in seeking care. Connie works one-on-one with families to connect parents/guardians with healthcare providers, coordinates care provided at school, and monitors student follow-up appointments. Once the appropriate connections are made and students begin following a treatment plan, students show improvement in school and social functioning in a short period of time.

Connecting students to health care and health insurance

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Grant School in New Mexico serves students from over 20 tribal nations, who are from a vast geographic area and who often experience health disparities. The school nurse makes arrangements to have representatives from the nearby Indian Health Service (IHS) hospital on site to provide information about Medicaid to parents/guardians and assist with enrollment. After students are enrolled in a health insurance plan, the school health center serves as the medical home, but students are also registered at the IHS hospital in case there is a need for additional health services.

Coordinating care and connecting families to community resources

Gail, an elementary school nurse, works one-on-one with students and their families to navigate the healthcare system. For one fifth grade student undergoing cosmetic surgery to repair a scar left from a surgery at birth, Gail was instrumental in helping the non-English speaking mother schedule appointments, arrange transportation, and understand her role in home care. In addition, Gail worked with the student to maintain her self-esteem and avoid being bullied.

Collecting and monitor data

School nurses in California collect data from a new nursing log system to analyze outputs, spot trends, and monitor progress in addressing health disparities. The project is still in its early stages, but they hope to use the data to look for inequities in the types of students seen, services rendered to students, and outcomes experienced. In addition, the data will facilitate conversations in nurse meetings to reflect on cultural influences of the nurses themselves, their schools, and their practice. The goal is to show that school nurses are accessing and appropriately serving at-risk students with interventions that indicate positive short- and long-term outcomes.

School nurses are key members of the education team and leaders of school health who keep students healthy, safe, and ready to learn.