

## **Counseling and Health Education Program Planning in the Field of Education: The Role of the School Nurse**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mental health issues were considered, even to this day, an exclusive responsibility of the health professionals. However, recent studies, based on the development of needs, led to the realization that an effective school is not only responsible for the mental development of its students, but it is also required to incorporate counseling support programs which would aid the students on their emotional and psychological issues.

Therefore, the role of the school nurse seems to be determinant for the promotion of the students' mental health and today, the school is considered to be responsible for the children's safety and well-being. Besides, all children are equally entitled to learn the methods that will help them ensure and shield both their physical and mental health and safety.

**Key-words:** counseling support, health education, school nurse, prevention, intervention.

### **Introduction**

According to the constitution of the World Health Organization «health is the condition of the full physical, emotional and social well-being and not just the absence of an illness or a disability». A different definition views health as the result of a person's physical condition, which is also influenced by the environment.

The definition of health, according to the World Health Organization, includes at least three dimensions. The first focuses on the biological side of health and is mainly about the physical disability or the social roles which are adopted by each person and the last is about the psychological factors. According to the last view, personal experiences and cognitive factors can predict a person's good health or the occurrence of a disease and therefore, people are responsible or in charge of their own health and health is a psychosocial phenomenon.

In 1972, the World Health Organization issued the

following definition for Health Education: «Health education is a process which bridges the gap between health information and health practice». That definition was modified later on: «Health education is an educational process with many parameters (mental, psychological and social) which includes activities, which help identify a person's health problems and reinforce that person's responsibility and ability to make the right decisions regarding his personal well-being, and also the well-being of his family and the society he is a part of».

The definition of Health Education that was approved by the EU in 1986 reports that «Health Education is a process which is based on scientific principles and uses planned learning opportunities which give people a chance, either as individuals or a group, to decide and act consciously (informed) on matters that affect their own health».

## Purpose and goals of counseling in the matter of Health Education

Health Education is an cross-thematic activity, an innovative action which has a particularly significant and necessary contribution in school life today. The role of Counseling in Health Education is to advocate, improve and promote the students' emotional and physical well-being, on one hand by increasing their social skills and critical thinking, and on the other hand, by upgrading their social and physical environment.

Alongside the above main purpose, there are various general goals which provide both general and specific

directions to the counseling support programs.

The main goals are the following:

- Inform young people thoroughly about the risks that threaten their mental and physical health. Alyson Moon (1998) reports that all children are entitled to learn the methods that will help them ensure both their physical and mental health and safety.
- Develop the children's skills and critical thinking, improve their self-confidence and self-esteem, and also improve their ability to negotiate and make the right choices.

## The role of the nurse in the school environment

Nurses get the chance to be around children, come close to them in the school environment and recognize the students' difficulties (Malikiosi – Loizou, 1999).

A Health Education program in the school environment may focus on improving the student's ability to «take care completely of himself», but it is the school nurse who is called to resign of her traditional role, and become a «student» and a partner of the students inside the program.

He is required to not have any prejudice, to care about everyone without any discrimination and respect the students' temperament; to coordinate the ideas and the experiences that are learned and not just solely emit knowledge.

School nurses must first investigate and evaluate their own feelings, values and views, in order to cultivate feelings of self-esteem, self-evaluation and self-control to their students through their behavior. It is necessary to show respect to their students, their choices and the way they express them and show them clearly that they accept them. Acceptance is a decisive factor that promotes interpersonal relationships.

However, in order for the school nurses to possess

these skills, a training and support network must be created by the school nurses and the various mental health professionals. The training of the school nurses is the means for them to learn the required know how, in order to operate as councils within the school community to help deal with the preteen and teen issues in health promotion.

The modern school nurse takes on the duty to contribute to the creation of capable and mentally healthy people. He is called, therefore, to act as a council whose relationship with the students may sometimes include some or all of the following factors (absolutely necessary in the counseling relationship):

1. Recognize the problem her student/s might have
2. Coincide with the students and be authentic towards them
3. Always acknowledge the students unconditionally, in a positive way
4. Understand and empathize with them

The acknowledgement of the students and their feelings, even the ones that scare them, is considered important for their emotional development and helps them find positive solutions.

## The role of the parents

Everyone accepts society today demands from adults, both parents and educators, in order for them to help their children grow, that they also «grow» along with them. In an ever changing world, solid reference points cannot be found «outside», but inside the person.

The role of the parent is «learned» and almost every parent goes back to the experience he had from his parents and his early infancy. However, in modern times, there are no solid values, set roles and other solid

reference points. The changes are frequent and rapid, and these changes, that affect the role of the parents, include a lot of anxiety and uncertainty, but also include opportunities for a better personal journey for the parents and their children, as well as more efficient inner growth (Kalogridis, 2006). The current Health Education programs deal with the parental role not only as an emanation of an external learning process, but also as an honest internal procedure (Kleftaras, 2002).

## Methodology for developing Health Education programs

A certain methodology with specific teaching tools is used in order to develop Counseling support and Health Education programs. The current Health Education methodology is no longer based on just information and knowledge communication regarding specialized health issues. Instead, various means, aiming towards the more energetic and experiential learning of the program's material, are used in order to complete its goals.

This methodology recommends:

- To approach the school class as a group
- To focus on the pedagogic relationship
- To use energetic listening as a form of communication
- To use an cross-thematic approach through a more unified form of teaching
- To use researching methods in order to gradually build knowledge

The Psychosocial model is recommended as the most fitting approach. The model introduces the concept of social skills and develops:

- ways of communication
- ways of resolving a problem
- ways of decision making
- ways of making conscious choices, etc.

In regard to health promotion and education, therefore, it is apparent that the implementation of teaching and learning methods, which encourage participation and cooperation, is required. Just teaching people what is useful, helpful and right does not suffice in producing the necessary results. All people, and of course all students, must be actively involved and feel that what they are learning is relevant to their own experiences.

In the traditional teaching method the communication of information is a one-way street, from the educator to the student. In the participial approach or the active learning the School Nurse implements a dual process: she discovers the students' needs, their views and how they feel and she finds ways to satisfy these needs; according to

the theory of Rogers, «I know that I cannot teach anything to anyone, I can only create the environment in which a person might learn something» (Malikiosi – Loizou, 1999).

Using the method of the group- centered teaching and the participial approach, the school nurse encourages the students to take on the responsibility of learning and growing, in order to feel capable to take control of their lives and be responsible of their own decisions. Specifically, when we refer to mental health promotion, people must be assisted in order to recognize their views and feelings, to accept them and thus support their sense of self-value.

The children's interaction within the group contributes to the reduction of the mistakes and helps them manage the various suggestions and alternative solutions (Georgas, 1986). Children understand better that in order to resolve their problems, they need to interact with the «significant others» that surround them (Cross, 1981).

Malcolm Knowles suggests that a necessary condition of the learning process is a learning contract which would be used by the trainees to identify their needs, define their goals, identify their learning strategies and evaluate their progress (Cross, 1981).

By observing the Health Education programs that were conducted in our country, we discovered that they were designed based on the aforementioned methods, by considering methodology as one of the most important factors contributing to the program's success.

It is important to point out that in order for the Health Education programs to have the desired outcome, certain skills are required; certain conditions in order for the counseling relationship to function right and constructively in the program (correct perception, focus, search for/accenuate the child's talents, careful observation and active listening, use of questions, encouragement, reflection of emotions, rephrase, paraphrase, interpretation, information and guidance).

## Planning and implementation of prevention programs and intervening counseling and health education programs

Counseling and Health Education are mainly cross-thematic and cross-scientific activities. Therefore, in order for their respective programs to be efficient, they must deal with holistic matters and they must integrate with other courses of the analytical program through the cross-thematic approach. Both the student's composition and the nature of our courses allow us to implement and direct us towards the implementation of the most effective learning process, the cross-thematic approach.

Through the cross-thematic approach the subject isn't just being studied during a specific hour inside or outside of the schedule with the participation of those who feel willing, but it is brought up again inside the schedule,

connected with other classes. Moreover, with that method, all the students are activated to participate. The cross-thematic approach enables the student to enrich and formulate his knowledge around a subject, through various aspects of the schedule and transform school knowledge in daily practices and actions that have a direct positive effect on his lifestyle. The school nurse's ability to integrate what her students need to understand regarding a health promotion matter in various cognitive subjects is what is going to lead her to the success or failure of the identified goal.

Counseling isn't dealt as a single cognitive subject, but it is a component of every aspect of the school life and

supplies students with abilities, such as:

- To identify, sort out and utilize information.
- To design a research and evaluate the data of that research.
- To communicate.
- To interpret the relationships between people and the natural world.
- To identify the risks that threaten them.
- To cooperate with others.
- To socialize.

### **The role of the school nurse in developing prevention and health promotion programs in Primary education**

Objectives:

- To understand the role of family as a «place» that provides safety and protection and to point out the various roles of each member (parent, child, grandfather, grandmother, etc.).
- To realize how friends are made and stress the importance of friendship in their lives.
- To discuss issues regarding the way children utilize their environment, in order to satisfy some of their needs.
- To understand basic parameters and ways in which the social and cultural habits affect and shape views and

models of behavior and identification.

*Some indicative activities:*

Through the following activities we can achieve the goals below:

- Group dynamic development,
- role playing games,
- research questionnaire,
- artistic creation,
- work in small groups on health education issues,
- mimetic games on health issues.

### **The role of the school nurse in developing prevention and health promotion programs in Secondary education**

Objectives:

- a) To identify the factors that contribute to shaping each student's personal identity.
- b) Self-awareness and to understand the way each student relates to his classmates and especially to the «significant others» in his life.
- c) To realize the importance of their feelings and the effect that these feelings have on the relationship with other people and on the way they feel about themselves.
- d) The interaction between teenagers and its importance on shaping views, behaviors, emotions, needs and desires; connection with more specific issues, such as how I am affected by other on matters of eating, sexual behavior; use of substances, how I deal with cases of pressure from others on matters regarding my personal safety, use of substances, my relationships with the other sex.

users so as not to relapse or to avoid further complications that have to do with drug use. Research on some of the causes that lead people to using drugs justifies the emphasis that is given by the primary prevention programs on supporting individual and social skills.

*Afterword*

The conclusions that are drawn from implementing Prevention and Intervention programs on health issues in schools worldwide are not so favorable in regard to their performance on children functioning. Particularly, it has been concluded that (Hatzichristou, 2004):

- A large percentage of children and teenagers face many developmental problems
- These issues are complex, interconnected and are related to various socioeconomic parameters.
- Only a few of the professionals involved care about the children's mental health.
- Lack of counseling support and therapeutic intervention.

Therefore, according to these conclusions, there is a strong and urgent need for:

- Cooperation between all of the professionals in the field of health, education, social welfare and justice.
- Full scale development of service provision models.
- Cooperation, coordination, connection of services, professionals, systems and cross-scientific cooperation of experts.
- Service development depending on the individual characteristics of each area (ethnic/cultural differences).

*Some indicative activities:*

Group dynamic development, role playing games, research questionnaire, artistic creation, work in small groups, all of the above must deal primarily with health education issues.

Furthermore, the role that a school nurse might have on developing prevention programs against the use of addictive substances is extremely important.

Primary prevention programs aim to inhibit or delay the onset of substance abuse, as well as the transition from experimenting to using systematically. Contrarily, secondary and tertiary prevention aim to help systematic

- Activation of groups, PTAs (parent-teacher associations).
- Frequent evaluation of prevention and intervention programs.
- Frequent expert training and education (Hatzichristou,

2004). The school nurse can become a connective link between all of the related parties in order to help them achieve their goals; provide constant and substantial aid to students in primary or secondary education.

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