

Original Article

Forgotten Voices: The Onerous Role of School Health Nurses Residential Schools of India- A View Point

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ABSTRACT

Background: School health nursing is a specialized practice that addresses students' well-being. Apart from routine health screening, immunization, and health education, the role of school health nurses is expanding to deal with public health crises. remains a challenging concept to practice school health nursing. This article reflects on the challenges of school health nurses and methods to overcome these challenges at different levels- Individual, Professional, Organizational, and Policymaking

Methods: Continuing professional education is the best way to manage school health nursing challenges. Upgradation of knowledge and skills can offer new career opportunities. The following are the methods to overcome the challenges discussed above.

Results: Discrepancies in guidelines and protocols and lack of written standing orders for school health practice reflect inconsistent and incompatible expectations and demands at work. Information deficits concerning which tasks and responsibilities individuals should undertake have been shown to result in work stress. Policies and protocols exist but not in reality. Policies, protocols, annual performance appraisal records, and training schedules exist for school health nurses but not in reality and practice


Conclusion: In residential schools, the school nurse is often the only healthcare professional to meet the students and staff's routine and emergency needs. The work of school nurses is essential in supporting children to have a whole, active, and healthy school life. With such an important role, adequate school nurses must be recruited and provided with the necessary power and infrastructure to ensure their positive contribution to student's health

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
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Introduction

An exciting trend that has caught on since the past decade is the increasing popularity of residential/ boarding schools in various settings in our country. Aspirational middle-class working parents

prefer a well-rounded residential school education for their children, ([Alsheikh et al., 2022](#); [Figueiredo et al., 2023](#); [Kurpiel et al., 2021](#)). There are more than 5000 boarding schools in India. Health services in schools are a key component of the whole school



and the whole community. NASN data shows only 39% of public schools have a school nurse all day, and 35% have a school nurse who works part-time, leaving 25% of schools without a full-time school nurse (López Frías, 2022; Vani & Arumugam, 2020; Yaranal et al., 2022).

School health nurses are often the only health care professionals available in the schools to handle emergencies and routine management of the health conditions of students (Goje, 2020; Hofmann-Aßmus, 2019; Nakano & Rossetto, 2021; Silva, 2019). This article is intended to discuss the

challenges faced by school health nurses in boarding schools and methods to overcome these challenges.

Methods

Continuing professional education is the best way to manage school health nursing challenges. Upgradation of knowledge and skills can offer new career opportunities. The following are the methods to overcome the challenges discussed above.

Results

Tabel 1. Essential Qualification

No	Type of organization	Job title	Essential qualification	Pay level	Remarks
1.	Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (under the ministry of education)	Female Staff Nurse (Group B)	1. a) Passed Sr. Secondary Examination (Class XII) or equivalent and b) Grade 'A' (Three years) Diploma/Certificate in Nursing from a recognized Institution. (or) B.Sc. (Nursing) from a recognized University/ Institution. 2. Registration with the Indian/ State Nursing Council. 3. I have two years of practical experience in a hospital/clinic.	Level-7, Grade Pay 4600(Rs.44900-142400) in the Pay Matrix	No promotional and Inservice/continuing education opportunities
2.	Sainik schools (under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence)	Nursing Assistant	Completed 10 th diploma/degree in nursing from any of the recognized boards or university	Level-4(Grade Pay 2400) 25500	No promotions



No	Type of organization	Job title	Essential qualification	Pay level	Remarks
3.	Social welfare residential, educational institutions society (health, medical, and family welfare department)	Staff Nurse	Completed intermediate and general nursing and midwifery/B.Sc. (Nursing) Registration with the Indian/State Nursing Council	25,140-73,270	No promotional and Inservice/continuing education opportunities
4.	Residential, educational institutions society (Residential junior and degree colleges in general and for minorities)	Staff Nurse	Completed intermediate and general nursing and midwifery/B.Sc. (Nursing) Registration with the Indian/State Nursing Council	Approx Rs. 20,000 to 30,000 per month	Appointments are primarily on a casual or contractual basis, not a regular No promotional and Inservice/continuing education opportunities
5	Rashtriya military school (under the ministry of defense)	Nursing assistant/ medical assistant	I have completed a 10th diploma/degree in nursing from any recognized board or university.	Level-4(Grade Pay 2400) 25500	Grade pay is inconsistent with similar nursing jobs with similar job descriptions.
6	Private and other public-aided schools	Staff Nurse	Completed intermediate and general nursing and midwifery/B.Sc. (Nursing) Registration with the Indian/State Nursing Council	Approx Rs. 20,000 to 30,000 per month	Appointments are primarily on a casual or contractual basis, not a regular No promotional and Inservice/continuing education opportunities

Tabel 2. Methods to overcome the challenges:

Challenges faced	Methods to overcome
At individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complete higher degree and Certification ● Courses for advancement of skills ● Improve communication ● Share opinions and invite others too ● To do best and build vital networking and leadership skills ● Broadcast your accomplishments

At professional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be clear with your career path, and don't ignore long-term career growth ● Update professional and career trends ● Open to your managers and administrators ● Don't be afraid to consider a career change ● Be in contact with professional bodies and organizations ● Continuing professional education
At organizational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing training and career development opportunities ● Foster workplace relationships ● Offer competitive benefits ● Transparency in employee performance appraisal ● Prioritize workplace wellness ● Training programs to update technology skills
At policy level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional associations should understand that their primary function is to create brand recognition for their members. ● Nursing governing bodies should lead in maintaining uniform standard policies in the recruitment process, promotional procedures, etc. ● Nurses' inputs from various disciplines must be considered in policy development and advocacy. ● Changes in policy development and advocacy toolkits must be available on nursing organizations' websites.

Discussion

Challenges faced by school health nurses

At the individual level:

Lack of job satisfaction:

Most of the school health services are provided by school health nurses alone. They express job dissatisfaction due to many reasons related to a lack of clear-cut job descriptions, less pay and no proper allowances, an unsupportive working environment, a lack of career growth opportunities, etc. ([Bhattacharya, 2019](#); [Wilson, 2019](#))

Role conflict and role ambiguity:

Due to the nature of the job and, most importantly, unclear or uncertain role expectations, most school health nurses are subjected to competing or conflicting sets of

expectations /demands in an organization, resulting in role conflict and role ambiguity.

The nature of the job itself is lonesome:

In a school environment, nurses are the only healthcare professionals on the campus, which can create feelings of loneliness and seclusion. Due to a lack of companionship and personification, many nurses experience stress and are isolated from the nursing environment and profession. School nurses will work in isolation as compared to other healthcare settings. They'll no longer get support and advice from colleagues in making vital decisions about students' health.

Lengthy working hours and more workload:

Most boarding schools in India will have approximate strength of 500 to 1000 and above with students of different age groups. Most of the boarding schools are located on campus, where, apart from

students, most of the staff reside within the campus and their family members. Most schools have only one SHN, which creates a caseload. School nurses are expected to be available to the students outside of the working days when required or requested to do so for handling routine and emergency health services.

Communication challenges: School nurses sometimes face challenges communicating effectively with school administration, parents, doctors, pharmacies, and healthcare bodies regarding student health. This challenge may occur due to too many priorities, language barriers, and cultural differences among the staff and students.

Record-keeping challenges: The critical task of school nurses is to maintain and update the school's health records. Record keeping is difficult and time-consuming for school health records and reports about annual health cards, immunization, referral to specialty clinics, daily sick reports, procurement and issue of medicines, health screening, campaigns, etc.

Lack of accommodation and transport facilities:

No residential schools offer proper accommodation and transport facilities except for a few schools. Inadequate facilities and resources remain a barrier to effective school nursing practice. This is the challenge nurses face when their job appointment is contractual or temporary.

Inconsistent work schedules: School nurses work in irregular shifts, contrasting those with more standard, regular shifts. Their daily timing of work schedules can often be irregular or unpredictable. This irregular shift work is associated with working longer weekly hours, resulting in more significant work stress.

At professional level:

Career stagnation: Due to routine work exposure, there will be fewer positive changes in the career, which may result in loss of professional skills and career stagnation.

No contact with professional organizations: After induction into the school health job, nurses fail to brand themselves for certifications/registrations with professional organizations because they may consider it unnecessary and not beneficial.

Lack of professional advancement: The lack of opportunities for Staff development programs is most commonly cited in school health nursing. This is a leading barrier to the professional growth of school nurses.

Poor Networking Skills: The more professional connections you have and maintain, the more likely you are to be able to progress from positions, find future career opportunities, and stay up-to-date on your latest professional trends and advancements. This is one of the biggest challenges faced by school health nurses.

No promotional opportunities: The scope for promotional opportunities for school health nurses in India is nil. No employee wants to be stuck in a dead-end job, regardless of its benefits. Because of this, many nurses begin to look for work elsewhere when they realize they have no promotion opportunities at schools. For example, nurses working in well-recognized government residential schools like JNV's (Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya) and military schools will never have promotional opportunities.

Problem with confidentiality: As most students and staff live in small communities within the campus, maintaining confidentiality of health information becomes a significant concern for school nurses.

Problems of ethics about professional practice: School administrators, staff, and

parents are often not knowledgeable about the nurse's professional ethics, standards, and limitations of nursing practice. In certain instances, the student's health care will be a priority for SHN but may not be the same for school administrators. Here, the conflict in viewpoint also arises because providing healthcare is not the primary objective in an academic environment.

At organizational level:

Limited resources and lack of equipment: Dispensaries and medical inspection rooms established will not be well equipped, and there is a continuous scarcity of resources regarding men, money, and materials.

Lack of funding mechanism: Irregular and inadequate school funding is a significant problem that directly affects the quality of services provided—lack of funding for procuring medicines, ambulance services, and necessary medical equipment.

Less collaboration with the health care department: A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration approach may not be a new concept for school nurses. However, there is less accessibility for Working in collaboration with public health officials.

Understaffing: The fact that the schools didn't have adequate and dedicated full-time nurses is, unfortunately, a common occurrence. Some of the residential schools do not have a nurse on campus at all. Schools are experiencing a nursing shortage that puts children's health at risk. But it's grown worse in recent years, with the COVID pandemic adding to the confusion, and public health officials worry the crisis will only continue in the years to come.

Information technology: A significant challenge is access to information technology and a lack of information technology facilities. Adequate IT facilities

help nurses maintain students' cumulative electronic health records.

At the policy-making level:

Lack of Standing orders: Discrepancies in guidelines and protocols and lack of written standing orders for school health practice reflect inconsistent and incompatible expectations and demands at work. Information deficits concerning which tasks and responsibilities individuals should undertake have been shown to result in work stress. Policies and protocols exist but not in reality. Policies, protocols, annual performance appraisal records, and training schedules exist for school health nurses but not in reality and practice.

No clear job description: It's a problem that has troubled educators for over a century, partly because schools have struggled to define the nurse's role. No policy accurately defines the roles and responsibilities of school health nurses.

No uniform policy in recruiting school health nurses: The most frequently reported school-based challenges school nurses face are job roles and responsibilities not being well defined. Discrepancies in recruitment policies related to Job title, Essential qualification, Method of selection, pay level, etc, are frequently observed in recruiting school health nurses at both state and national organizations.

For example, Below is the job notification of school health nurses at different institutions with variations in recruitment policy.

Conclusion

In residential schools, the school nurse is often the only healthcare professional to meet the students and staff's routine and emergency needs. The work of school nurses is essential in supporting children to have a whole, active, and healthy

school life. With such an important role, adequate school nurses must be recruited and provided with the necessary power and infrastructure to ensure their positive contribution to student's health. The government and nursing professional bodies like INC (Indian Nursing Council) should take the lead in regularising uniform policies in recruiting health care professionals at boarding schools. School health nurses should take the initiative to build professional connections and focus on career success.

Authors Contributions

The author carries out tasks from data collection, data analysis, and discussions to making manuscripts.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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