

ON BEING A SCHOOL NURSE:

The Value of Reflection and Humor

Your duty as school nurse is mainly to the children and the families under your care. This requires you to provide the most comprehensive care possible in a facility that is a long way from a clinical setting, situated instead in an educational, non-medical atmosphere. There are no peers on site, no one to relate to on a professional healthcare level. This is not a hospital where you might solve a problem with any number of other nurses because they are all within yelling distance.

The main focus in the school setting obviously is not health, and so you alone, the isolated healthcare professional, are expected to assess, treat, and follow up. And you also will be asked to provide medical, emotional and psychological consulting and counseling, perform all the mandated services, and complete myriad reports. Of course you can, you say.

The main function of your day, of course, is problem resolution while being ever vigilant for “the emergency.” Consider the possible serious injury. You must never appear to be “losing it.” You can’t. That privilege is reserved for everyone else in school. Consider the recreation aide who carries a hurt child into your office, screaming (not the child, the aide). But now, the child is wailing, terrified that total loss of the injured arm or leg is imminent. To a child, bleeding can equal death!

No one must be aware that the nurse has concerns. Do not let on, no matter how grave the situation appears. Give clear, firm, *very loud*, directives. Shut up the screamers by saying just that, if you must. The rest of the school personnel have got to work with you. Instruct someone to call 911, should

it be necessary. Assign someone else to call parents and tell them to get to the school — now!

Your focus is the child. You should have already ascertained who is the most level-headed, available, office staff member. This person is now your assistant. (You need to have made sure this person knows CPR. If your district will not provide for training a few school personnel, help them find community classes through the local fire department or, at the very least, help them learn what CPR is and why you will be doing it.) Make everyone you don’t need leave the area; this is crucial.

As the ship is going down in a sea of non-medical crew, make sure there are a few who can help man the lifeboat. You are going to be the one who makes the healthcare-level calls. Your justifications are the ones that are going to be on the line. Plans and strategies should be formulated in advance. Think of as many scenarios as you can and pray that when the emergency comes — and it will — the appropriate course of action presents itself to you, the school nurse, the hero.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Pippa, RN is a retired school nurse who worked with regular and special education students during the calendar year and summer school. She has a BSC in Health Science, a certificate in Drug and Alcohol Counseling, a School Nurse certificate, and an MA in Education. She is a freelance writer in Long Beach, California. She knows the seriousness of the job. She shares: “Injecting a little levity into life can be a stress reducer and a reality refresher for the hard-working school nurse. I hope you agree and that you like my commentary.”