

Challenges for Nurses in the Medical Profession to Bring Their Expertise to the School Setting: Focusing on Supporting the School Life of Children with Complex Medical Care Needs

Authors : Ikuko Tomomatsu, Beverley Anne Yamamoto

Abstract : Background: There has been an increase in the number of Children with Complex Medical Care Needs (CCMCN) living outside hospital settings in Japan. Most CCMCNs require someone to provide or support them in the provision of care and to respond in the case of an emergency in their everyday lives, including in school settings. One or two yoga teachers qualified within the teacher-training system to work in the health rooms in schools, are assigned to schools in Japan based on enrollment numbers, and are responsible for all students' health. CCMCN requires individualized support, which the Yogo teachers cannot adequately provide. Clinically trained nurses have increasingly been allocated to mainstream schools to provide medical care support for the CCMCN as a new kind of school nurse, but the supply has fallen far short of demand. In 2021, the Act on Support for Children with Complex Medical Care Needs and their Families was passed, requiring local governments to assign school nurses to schools to support CCMCN. The study aimed to understand these nurses' experiences (job description, rewards, challenges) allocated to schools to provide medical care for CCMCN. The study also aimed to explore what professional development looks like for nurses working in schools. Methods: Using a semi-structured interview technique, we interviewed sixteen nurses currently providing care to CCMCN in mainstream schools. Using an interview guide, they were asked about their work, satisfaction, challenges and concerns, thoughts on professionalism, and the educational and training environment. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. We conducted a thematic analysis of the data. Results: The main concerns and problems were not directly related to medical care delivery but to communication with the children, the teachers' understanding of educational policy, and the principal's philosophy. Unlike medical institutions, where treatment is the priority, most children do not need treatment in schools. Even those needing medical care do not need interventions for most of the day. In this environment, the nurses interviewed reported that it is important to understand the school situation and the teachers' philosophies when providing medical care. One of the main challenges is knowing what to do when not providing care, especially if requests from school staff have nothing to do with their professional skills. Conclusion: Through the analysis of concerns and challenges faced by the nurses, the process of providing medical care in a school setting as a health care provider was discussed as follows. Each nurse contemplates the methods and implications of safely implementing medical care in schools. This was considered a process of situating the implementation of medical care by the nurses in the context of education. This requires that the nurses develop new skills and knowledge, which some nurses find stimulating while others find challenging.

Keywords : school nurse, children with complex medical care needs, professionalization, mainstream school

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