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School Nurse Perceptions of Child Asthma Management: Collaboration Through Research Supporting Community-Accessible Care

Linda Gibson-Young, PhD, CRNP, FNP-BC, FAANP

School of Nursing, Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA

Ellen B. Buckner, PhD, RN, CNE, AE-C, FNAP

Ida Moffett School of Nursing, College of Health Sciences, Samford University, Birmingham, AL, USA

Julee Waldrop, DNP, FAANP

College of Nursing, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL, USA

Brenda Lindahl, RN

Auburn City Schools, Auburn, AL, USA

Purpose: Asthma is recognized as a common condition with global burden affecting more than 300 million children and adults worldwide. School nurses are community-based frontline providers who support asthma management and promote optimal health in children and youth. The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of school nurses in Alabama, USA, on managing asthma in the school setting. This study was a collaboration among members of the Alabama Asthma Coalition (AAC), a state coalition in the USA with providers from clinical practice, academia, and advocacy organizations. School nurses represent a wide range of educational levels and years' experience and Alabama is a highly rural state with all counties having medically underserved areas. Thus, these school nurse perspectives may give insight to those from a broader global nurse provider population.

Healthcare professionals frequently attribute high morbidity, mortality, burden, costs, and challenges in the care of children with asthma to insufficient family care or self-management (Akimbami, et al., 2016). Inadequate management of asthma results from poor adherence with healthcare provider recommendations and inaccuracy of symptom perception and severity recognition. School nurses are frontline healthcare providers who can have a global impact on prevention and control of this non-communicable disease (NCD). Multiple initiatives from global organizations provide guidance for community-based management approaches (GAN, 2019; GINA 2019; NHLBI, 2019; WHO, 2012). In Alabama, USA, asthma is the most common chronic condition in children and a leading cause of school absenteeism. Managing children with asthma in the school system is challenging for school nurses, yet few studies reported the perceptions of school nurses themselves. In this cross-sectional study, perceptions of Alabama school nurses on managing asthma in the school were explored.

Methods: Four team members/authors of the AAC represented school nurses, academic nurse educators, primary care provider nurse practitioner, and researchers. Authors developed the 12-item survey that included both quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions. The IRB-approved survey was distributed to a statewide school nurse meeting with n = 173 respondents. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics (SPSS Version 26) and supported with participant comments.

Results: After review of the survey data, three themes were identified including nurses' role, barriers, and needs. Nurses reported routinely assessing students' asthma symptoms and patterns, students' and parent's knowledge, and environmental factors. They had access to some equipment but needed other resources. The greatest barrier to performing education was time available in the school day. School nurses identified needs for updated education, medication/equipment, and strategies for improving collaboration among other school personnel, providers, and parents.

Conclusion: School nurses feel prepared to manage asthma but identify lack of certain resources and supportive policies, especially access to medications and time limitations as barriers to optimum care. Globally, school nurses are in a significant position to influence asthma self-management and optimize outcomes. Findings in this study reveal strategies for improving asthma care worldwide. Implications for advocacy at the policy level and broadening educational activities are supported by the survey results.

Title:

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Keywords:

asthma management, collaboration and school nurses

Abstract Summary:

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of school nurses on managing asthma in the school setting. This study was a collaboration among a USA state coalition members from clinical practice, academia, and advocacy organizations. Implications for advocacy at the policy level with educational activities are supported.

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First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Linda Gibson-Young, PhD, CRNP, FNP-BC, FAANP
 Auburn University
 School of Nursing
 Associate Professor
 Auburn, Alabama
 USA

Author Summary: Dr. Linda Gibson-Young is an Associate Professor at Auburn University in Alabama, USA. She is certified as a family nurse practitioner, nurse educator, and national asthma educator. Her research interest focuses on home interventions for families of children with chronic conditions by incorporating interdisciplinary teams. She has partnered with many to develop, implement, and disseminate TigerCHAT across Alabama.

Second Author

Ellen B. Buckner, PhD, RN, CNE, AE-C, FNAP
 Samford University
 Ida Moffett School of Nursing, College of Health Sciences
 Professor of Nursing
 Birmingham, Alabama
 USA

Author Summary: Dr. Buckner is Professor of Nursing at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. She is a Certified Nurse Educator, Certified Asthma Educator, and Distinguished Fellow in the National Academies of Practice. She collaborated in forming the STTI Global Leadership Mentoring Community of Interest. She is a member of Gamma Eta Chapter (Samford University), Zeta Gamma Chapter (University of South Alabama) and Nu Chapter (UAB).

Third Author

Julee Waldrop, DNP, FAANP
University of South Alabama
College of Nursing
Professor
Mobile, Alabama
USA

Author Summary: Julee Waldrop, DNP, PNP-BC, CNE, FAAN, FAANP, is the editor in chief of the Journal for Nurse Practitioners. She is an adjunct professor with the University of South Alabama in the College of Nursing, and is a coach in the Duke Johnson & Johnson Nurse Leadership Program, and a Fellow in both the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and the American Academy of Nursing.

Fourth Author

Brenda Lindahl, RN
Auburn City Schools
Nurse Administrator
Auburn, Alabama
USA

Author Summary: Ms. Lindahl is a Nurse Administrator with Auburn City Schools in Alabama. She is Responsible for supervision 16 school nurses and played a pivotal role in the creation and distribution of the school nurse survey.