Day in the life of a School Health Nurse

The School Health Nursing service is a community based year round service provided by a team of nurses led by qualified Specialist Community Public Health Nurses.

The School Health Nurse aims to promote, protect and safeguard the health and well being of children and young people. Each secondary school with its feeder primary schools has access to a named nurse.

Picture l-r: School Health Nurse Specialists, Gemma Woolfitt and Shireen Linton

Shireen Linton, School Health Nurse Specialist in Neath Port Talbot, said:

“It is nice to be able to work with children who are well, as the majority of the children in school are. It is our job to make sure they have the advice and support they need for a healthy future.

“I do feel that our role really does make a difference. We are educating the children while they are still young, teaching them how to access help when they need it. We want to help them make decisions which will positively affect the rest of their lives.

“By promoting positive messages and teaching them skills when they are young, hopefully they will retain the information as they grow up.”

For children just starting school, aged between four and five, the School Health Nurse will measure the child’s height and weight and test their vision. If they discover any problems or cause for concern, the nurse can
discuss with parents and refer for further help and advice for example to an optician.

As children and young people progress through school, the School Health Nurse contributes to a number of health promotion and health education lessons including topics like hand washing, healthy eating and hygiene.

This part of their role also includes supporting education colleagues in schools by delivering sex and relationship education, including growing up and puberty in primary schools, and contraception and sexually transmitted infections in comprehensive schools.

The lessons are planned to make them appropriate for the age group which they are being delivered to. They provide the pupils with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss things in a safe environment. Props, books and games also help to demonstrate different facts.

Gemma Woolfitt, School Health Specialist Nurse in Neath Port Talbot, said:

“I really enjoy my job. It is lovely to be able to work with children and to help shape their future health and wellbeing. We try to make our advice as informal as possible. We don’t want the pupils to feel as though we are lecturing them or talking at them, as they wouldn’t take in as much information. However, all our presentations do have a serious message, and we try to make it as hard hitting as possible.

“In all of our secondary schools, we hold drop in sessions for students to come and talk confidentially if something is bothering them. The pupils know when we will be there and that we can provide help and advice.

“A lot of the pupils may not need to speak to us, but they have the peace of mind that should they want to, we are there. The guidance they ask for can vary. For example, sometimes we are asked for help to quit smoking, dietary advice or emotional help. We signpost them to the most appropriate form of support.”

The School Health Nurse can also check that the pupils’ immunisations are up to date. If a young person hasn’t had all of the injections they should have had at their age, the nurses make the parents/carer aware.
The School Health Nursing team vaccinate Year 8 girls with the HPV vaccine to protect them against cervical cancer. Pupils in year 10 are offered the diphtheria, tetanus and polio booster.

Shireen added:

“Another part of our role is safeguarding children. Sometimes things can happen in a child’s life, such as a bereavement, redundancy, or illness, which may mean they need extra support. On these occasions, meetings are held between all those who can help, and we are invited. We take on any actions which could benefit the child’s health or wellbeing.

“Sometimes when parents have any concerns about their child’s health and wellbeing, they ask for a home visit. By meeting at home, we learn more about the environment the child lives in, as well as their hygiene and eating habits. It enables us to see areas which we can help.”

School Health Specialist Nurses work 52 weeks a year. During the school holidays they take the opportunity to catch up on paperwork. They also use the time to carry out home visits as they can schedule the appointments during the day, allowing more flexibility for the families.