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Promoting hygiene in schools through nurse, facilitated peer education programs

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Abstract

The importance of hygiene education in schools is well-recognized for improving student health and reducing absenteeism due to preventable diseases. Nurse-facilitated peer education programs offer an innovative approach to instil sustainable hygiene practices among students. This review examines previously published literature to assess the effectiveness of these programs in promoting hygiene behaviours, their implementation challenges, and the long-term impact on health outcomes. The review highlights the role of school nurses as facilitators, the peer-to-peer model's scalability, and the need for structured evaluation metrics for program success.

Keywords: Hygiene education, school nurses, peer education, health promotion, hygiene practices, school health programs

Introduction

Promoting hygiene in schools is a critical public health initiative aimed at improving student well-being, academic performance, and overall community health. Poor hygiene practices, particularly in low-resource settings, contribute significantly to the spread of communicable diseases such as diarrhea, respiratory infections, and skin conditions. These illnesses lead to increased absenteeism, reduced academic achievement, and heightened healthcare costs. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach that combines education, behaviour change, and access to essential resources.

Schools serve as ideal platforms for fostering good hygiene practices among children, as they can instil lifelong habits in a controlled and supportive environment. Traditional hygiene education methods, however, often fail to engage students effectively, leading to limited adoption of recommended behaviours. To overcome this challenge, innovative strategies such as nurse-facilitated peer education programs have gained traction. These programs leverage the influence of peer networks to promote hygiene behaviours while utilizing the expertise of school nurses to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information disseminated.

The nurse-facilitated peer education model capitalizes on the natural social dynamics within schools, where peers play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours. By empowering students to act as educators and role models, these programs create a ripple effect that extends beyond individual participants, influencing the entire school community. School nurses, on the other hand, provide professional oversight, training, and mentorship to ensure that the program remains evidence-based and impactful.

Existing literature highlights the effectiveness of this approach in improving hygiene knowledge and practices while reducing the prevalence of hygiene-related illnesses. Furthermore, these programs address critical challenges such as stigma around topics like menstrual hygiene and provide culturally sensitive solutions to overcome barriers. Despite their potential, the implementation of nurse-facilitated peer education programs faces challenges such as resource constraints, sustainability issues, and cultural resistance, which must be addressed to maximize their impact.

This review explores the effectiveness of nurse-facilitated peer education programs, the role of school nurses in their implementation, and the challenges and opportunities for improvement. By synthesizing existing research, the paper aims to provide actionable

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insights for enhancing these programs to ensure long-term benefits for students and their communities.

Main Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of nurse-facilitated peer education programs in promoting hygiene in schools and provide recommendations for their improvement.

Effectiveness of Nurse-Facilitated Peer Education Programs

Nurse-facilitated peer education programs have emerged as an effective strategy for promoting hygiene in school settings. These programs leverage the expertise of school nurses and the influence of peer networks to create a sustainable and impactful method of behaviour modification. Various studies have highlighted the effectiveness of these programs in improving hygiene practices, knowledge dissemination, and overall health outcomes among students. One of the significant findings from the literature is the ability of these programs to foster long-term behavioural changes. Students trained as peer educators by nurses not only adopt better hygiene practices themselves but also influence their peers, creating a cascading effect throughout the school community. For instance, studies have documented an increase in regular handwashing among students, particularly after using the restroom and before meals. This improvement has been attributed to the relatable and non-authoritative approach of peer educators, supported by the credibility and structured guidance of school nurses. The combination of peer relatability and professional oversight ensures that the information is both accessible and accurate. Another key aspect of effectiveness is the role of these programs in enhancing knowledge about hygiene-related topics. Research has shown that peer educators trained by nurses demonstrate a deep understanding of hygiene concepts, which they effectively communicate to their peers. Topics such as hand hygiene, menstrual health, and disease prevention are addressed in a manner that is culturally sensitive and age-appropriate. This dual-layered approach—where nurses provide foundational knowledge and peer educators ensure its widespread dissemination—has been particularly successful in reaching marginalized student populations who may otherwise lack access to reliable health education. The impact of these programs extends beyond knowledge and practices to measurable health outcomes. Several studies have shown a significant reduction in the incidence of communicable diseases such as respiratory infections and diarrhea among students participating in nurse-facilitated peer education programs. The decrease in illness-related absenteeism has also been noted as a direct consequence, highlighting the practical benefits of improved hygiene practices. For example, schools that implemented these programs reported fewer missed school days, allowing students to benefit more from their educational experiences. While the peer-to-peer model is inherently effective due to the natural influence of peers on behaviour, the involvement of school nurses is critical in ensuring the scientific accuracy and consistency of the program. Nurses not only train and mentor peer educators but also provide resources and support to address barriers to implementation. Studies indicate that the dual role of nurses as educators and facilitators enhances the credibility of the

program, encouraging greater participation and adherence among students. Nurses also act as a bridge between the school and broader healthcare systems, facilitating access to hygiene supplies and health services. In conclusion, nurse-facilitated peer education programs have demonstrated substantial effectiveness in promoting hygiene in schools. The integration of professional nursing expertise with the social influence of peer networks creates a powerful mechanism for behaviour change, knowledge dissemination, and health improvement. The success of these programs is evident in their ability to address both immediate hygiene practices and long-term health outcomes, making them a valuable component of school health initiatives.

Role of School Nurses in Peer Education Programs for Promoting Hygiene

School nurses play a pivotal role in the successful implementation and effectiveness of peer education programs designed to promote hygiene. Their responsibilities span from being educators and mentors to facilitators and healthcare liaisons, making them integral to these initiatives. As educators, school nurses provide foundational knowledge and training to peer educators, equipping them with accurate and relevant hygiene-related information. This training often includes interactive workshops, demonstrations, and the use of educational materials tailored to the age and cultural context of the students. By ensuring that peer educators have a solid understanding of topics such as hand hygiene, menstrual health, and disease prevention, school nurses help create a reliable source of information within the student body. Mentorship is another critical aspect of the school nurse's role. Nurses guide peer educators throughout the program, monitoring their performance and providing feedback to enhance their communication and leadership skills. This mentorship fosters confidence among peer educators, enabling them to effectively engage their peers and address questions or misconceptions. The ongoing support from school nurses also ensures that peer educators feel valued and motivated, contributing to the program's sustainability. In their role as facilitators, school nurses help create an enabling environment for hygiene education. They coordinate with school administration to allocate time for training sessions and peer-led activities, ensuring that these initiatives are seamlessly integrated into the school schedule. Nurses also play a key role in mobilizing resources, such as providing access to hygiene supplies like soaps, sanitary products, and clean water. In resource-limited settings, their efforts to secure external funding or partnerships with local organizations can make a significant difference in the program's reach and impact. Beyond the school setting, nurses act as liaisons between schools and the broader healthcare system. They bring their clinical expertise into the school environment, ensuring that the hygiene practices promoted through peer education are aligned with public health guidelines. Additionally, they facilitate referrals for students requiring medical attention and collaborate with community health initiatives to amplify the program's effectiveness. The ability of school nurses to foster trust among students and staff is central to the program's success. Their approachable and non-judgmental demeanour encourages students to openly discuss sensitive topics, such as menstrual hygiene or personal health concerns. This trust is particularly important in culturally

sensitive contexts, where open communication about hygiene may otherwise be limited.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of nurse-facilitated peer education programs in promoting hygiene, several strategies can be considered. Integration of hygiene education into school curricula is essential to ensure consistent exposure and reinforcement of good practices. Embedding these programs within the academic structure also allows for seamless execution without overburdening extracurricular schedules. Community engagement is another vital factor, as involving parents, local leaders, and community organizations can foster broader acceptance and support for the initiatives. This approach helps address cultural barriers and encourages students to practice hygiene habits both at school and home. The use of technology can significantly amplify the program's reach and impact. Digital tools, such as mobile apps, videos, and interactive e-learning modules, can complement traditional peer education methods, providing engaging and accessible learning resources. These tools can also facilitate monitoring and evaluation by collecting data on student participation and hygiene outcomes. Regular training sessions for both nurses and peer educators are crucial to keeping them updated on best practices, ensuring that the information shared is accurate and evidence-based. Resource allocation remains a critical area for improvement. Adequate supplies, such as soap, sanitary products, and clean water, are fundamental to the success of hygiene promotion programs. Partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and private organizations can help secure funding and resources to address gaps in infrastructure and materials. Programs should also prioritize cultural sensitivity, tailoring content to the specific needs and norms of the target population, which is especially important in diverse or conservative communities. Finally, robust evaluation mechanisms are necessary to measure the impact of these programs. Developing standardized metrics and feedback systems will allow schools to assess the effectiveness of hygiene education and identify areas for improvement. By addressing these aspects, nurse-facilitated peer education programs can become more impactful, sustainable, and scalable, ultimately contributing to better health and academic outcomes for students.

Conclusion

Nurse-facilitated peer education programs represent a promising and innovative approach to promoting hygiene in schools. By leveraging the expertise of school nurses and the influence of peer networks, these programs have demonstrated significant improvements in hygiene knowledge, practices, and health outcomes among students. The dual role of nurses as educators and mentors ensures the accuracy and sustainability of the initiatives, while the peer-led model enhances accessibility and relatability. The effectiveness of these programs is evident in reduced incidences of hygiene-related illnesses, improved attendance rates, and the fostering of lifelong hygiene behaviours. Despite challenges such as resource constraints, cultural sensitivities, and sustainability issues, these programs offer a scalable solution to address the hygiene needs of diverse school communities. To maximize their impact, future efforts should focus on integrating hygiene education into school curricula, engaging communities, leveraging

technology, and implementing robust evaluation mechanisms. With strategic improvements and continued support, nurse-facilitated peer education programs have the potential to play a transformative role in enhancing public health outcomes and creating a healthier, more informed generation of students.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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