

School Medical Advisors: Recommendations for the Qualifications, Selection Process and Roles in the Implementation of School Health Services Programs in Connecticut Schools

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Introduction

It is now well recognized that the provision of a safe and healthy school environment will positively impact academic achievement. School Medical Advisors (SMAs) can contribute significantly to the creation of such an environment through their expertise and contacts within the community. To this end, Section 10-205 of the Connecticut General Statutes [<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/pub/Chap169.htm>] requires local or regional boards of education (BOEs) in towns having a population of 10,000 or more to appoint at least one legally qualified practitioner of medicine as school medical advisor. For towns with populations less than 10,000, the School Health Advisory Committee strongly advises them also to appoint a SMA or join with other towns to fill this position. Once appointed, a SMA should be actively and regularly engaged to maximize the benefit to the district's children of this unique resource.

Boards of Education (BOE), superintendents of schools, local or district health departments, and physicians responsible for school health programs have frequently requested information that describes the role of the SMA. In many instances, however, the SMA remains a very under-utilized resource. While the duties of the medical advisor have been spelled out in Section 10-207 of the Connecticut General Statutes [<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/pub/Chap169.htm>] this practical and comprehensive guide on the qualifications, selection, and roles of the SMA has been developed to meet the need for more information so as to encourage both districts to make greater use of the SMA and likewise to encourage SMAs to be more proactive in assisting districts to improve the health services available to their students.

Qualifications

Physicians, specifically medical doctors or doctors of osteopathy (MDs and DOs) appointed to carry out the duties of the SMA should be well qualified and competent in the care of children. The SMA must be licensed to practice medicine in Connecticut. Any physician who serves as a SMA must have (or have provided for them by the town or district) malpractice insurance in a suitable amount for the scope of services to be provided.

Physicians should have the respect and cooperation of the local medical profession, and be a pediatrician or family medicine practitioner with training in pediatric and adolescent medicine. An SMA should demonstrate a pro-active approach to the position by acting as an advocate for safe and healthy schools and by identifying important health issues where she or he can make a contribution.

Any physician who serves as a SMA should have training in the emotional and physical growth and development of children and should show evidence of continuing medical education and

experience in school health, as well as pediatrics or adolescent medicine, within the preceding five years.

Selection Process

When selecting a SMA, it is strongly recommended those who are most knowledgeable about the district's health services program as well as those whom this individual will be working with most closely will be included in the process of selecting the SMA. For example, the Director of Nursing will in most every instance meet both of these criteria and would be a logical choice for inclusion in this decision. Similarly the chair of the District Wellness Committee or health council would most likely be another appropriate choice. Other possible candidates would depend upon the organization of the particular district's health services program (such as, a representative from the local health district).

Roles

The amended statutory language defining the role of the SMA became effective July 1, 2012. While there may be a great deal of variability from one district to the next as to the specific duties assigned the SMA (e.g., some districts may wish them to perform sports physicals whereas others may be too large for this to be feasible), the following encompasses (but is not all inclusive of) those core functions that every SMA should be expected to perform in every district. Districts are encouraged to adapt this for use as a job description/scope of services when contracting with their SMAs.

Administration and Planning

The SMA contributes to the management of the school health program by collaborating with the school nursing supervisor/director, the school administration and the BOE to:

- Plan, review, evaluate and revise the school health program;
- Consult with the school nursing supervisor/director on an ongoing basis during the school year and with school administrators at least annually; and
- Participate in school health activities, such as the school wellness committee or health council and other appropriate committees.

School Health Services

The SMA responsibilities for providing school health services include:

- Assisting the district in obtaining health assessments as required by state statute and local or regional board policy;
- Advising the immunization program as required by state statute and local or regional BOE policy;
- Consulting with the school nurse supervisor/director in the development of nursing protocols for the assessment and management of students' health care problems;
- Providing consultation and, when appropriate, medical direction to the school nurse supervisor/director regarding in-school management of student medical problems;
- Providing standing orders for medications and medical treatments;

- Participating in establishing screening and referral procedures;
- Reviewing individual student health records as required;
- Consulting with planning and placement teams as needed when medical problems interface with education;
- Advising the district on health and safety issues related to its athletic programs, including concussion management; and
- Providing consultation to advanced practice nurses and, where appropriate, clinical supervision for medical diagnosis and treatment.

School Environment

The SMA provides consultation on the school environment by:

- Making recommendations for appropriate health facilities and equipment;
- Consulting on environmental health problems within the school system in collaboration with local public health personnel and school nursing personnel;
- Acting as a liaison with state officials; and
- Playing an active role in the development and review of environmental policies such as those for Indoor Air Quality, Green Cleaning, and Integrated Pest Management.

Other Duties

The SMA provides further consultation by:

- Participating in continuing education and in-service programs for school health nurses and other personnel;
- Participating in the development and updating of school health policies and protocols such as those for Medication Administration, Food Allergies, Indoor Air Quality and the District Wellness Plan;
- Responding to other requests for consultation by the local or regional boards of education, as needed;
- Acting as a resource in the planning and/or implementation of the health education curriculum;
- Interpreting the school health program and policies to parents, the community, the media and other physicians;
- Consulting with school personnel on issues such as health exemptions, outplacements, requests for home tutoring, etc.;
- Consulting with the district's Food Service on nutritional and other issues;
- Acting as liaison to the local or regional health department; and
- Acting as liaison to the American Academy of Pediatrics and/or American Academy of Family Practice, their Connecticut Chapters, and the Connecticut AAP School Health Committee.

References/Resources

- The American Academy of Pediatrics, Connecticut Chapter
<http://ct-aap.org/>
- Chapter 169: School Health and Sanitation (Statutes)
<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/pub/Chap169.htm>
- Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp>
- CSDE Health Promotion Services/School Nurse
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&q=320768>
- Administration of Medications by School Personnel and Administration of Medication During Before- and After-School Programs and School Readiness Programs
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/deps/student/health/Medication_Administration_Regs.pdf
- School Wellness Policies
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&q=322438>