Nursing Assessment in the School Setting

In all professional nursing practice areas, the components of the nursing process are the standards by which the nurse determines the status and existing needs of a population or client, and then plans and acts for addressing those needs. The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) details requirements for the use of the steps of the nursing process in the Components of Practice for the Registered Nurse, but all are dependent on the foundation of the assessment results. *School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 4th Edition* (2022) describes the standard of care regarding assessment as well as all components of the nursing process. The first standard, Assessment, states, "The School Nurse collects pertinent data and information relative to the student, family, group, school community, or population." While some nursing assessments are a quick mental process (a student presenting with a minor cut), others are more systematic and intentional (a medically fragile student with multiple issues).

The information gained through assessment is data. The ability to gather and organize that data and then make a judgment regarding the needed nursing response is what differentiates between the professional registered nursing license and the credentials of all other licensure levels in nursing. The registered nurse, acting within their full scope of practice, is the only independent comprehensive practitioner in nursing, as described in the NCBON Position Statement, *RN Scope of Practice-Clarification.* Understanding and sharing the unique role of the RN school nurse in assessment and judgment is critical in the provision of safe and legal care for students with health care needs in schools.

Documentation of assessment data in an organized manner, creating a record that may be reviewed and used, is a requirement of practice. Each school district should adopt a standard format and method for the recording of nursing assessment data that is used by all local school nurses, whether electronic or other method. Nurses may use any systematic process of client assessment and the format used for documentation should be reflective of the method adopted. Commonly used taxonomies and methods include Head to Toe, Body Systems, and Functional Health Patterns, among others. Electronic documentation platforms often dictate a systematic process for completion by nature of their structured order for recording of the data.

There are special considerations for school nurses providing routine assessment and examination of students in the school setting. School nurses should adhere to local policy surrounding the need for parental consent for assessment of students outside of routine or emergency care given to all students during the school day. Legal and ethical principles must be considered for any examination where a student would need to remove clothing or expose genital areas, and parental consent must be given before the nurse performs the examination, except when deemed urgent.

As the first step in determination of student care needs in the school setting, nursing assessment provides the data for the development of related Plans of Care (POC), such as Individual Health Care Plan (IHP) or Emergency Action Plan (EAP). The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) details the role of assessment for this purpose in the position statement, Use of Individualized Healthcare Plans to Support School Health Services (Revised January 2025). The use of strong assessment skills and consistent professional documentation practices contribute to

well-planned care for students and limited liability for nurses and their employers.

Reference

American Nurses Association and National Association of School Nurses. (2022). *School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*, *4th Edition.* Silver Spring, MD: ANA & NASN.