

The Role and Importance of School Nurses in Greek Schools

Maria Okoutsidou

*South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, BULGARIA
Faculty of Philosophy*

Abstract

The role of school nurses is pivotal in ensuring the health and the well-being of students. In Greek schools, the importance of a school nurse cannot be overstated. This article explores the multifaceted responsibilities of school nurses in Greek educational institutions, the challenges they face, and the impact they have on the school community.

Keywords: school nurses, role, students, responsibilities, challenges, impact.

1. Historical development of school nursing in Greece

The early initiatives and programs for school nursing in Greece were pivotal in laying the foundation for the comprehensive health services seen today. These initial efforts focused primarily on addressing the immediate health needs of students, such as providing first aid and managing minor illnesses within the school environment. This approach was crucial in establishing a baseline for health promotion and disease prevention in schools. As these programs gained traction, school nurses began to expand their roles to include health education, offering information on critical topics like nutrition and disease prevention to better equip students with the knowledge they need to make informed health decisions [1]. These early programs set the stage for a more integrated approach to student health, emphasizing the importance of a well-rounded education that includes physical and mental well-being.

Over time, the roles of school nurses in Greece have evolved significantly, reflecting changes in both healthcare and education. Initially, their responsibilities were fairly limited, focusing on basic healthcare tasks. However, as the understanding of student health broadened, so too did the scope of school nursing. School nurses became integral to the educational environment, taking on responsibilities that included not only health education but also the monitoring and support of students' overall well-being [1]. Their roles have expanded to encompass a more holistic approach to student health, considering factors such as mental and social development. This evolution highlights the dynamic nature of school nursing, adapting to the changing needs of the student population and the educational system.

The integration of school nurses into the Greek educational system has been a gradual yet transformative process. Initially, school nurses were primarily present in special education settings, often at the request of parents seeking additional support for their children [2]. This specific focus has gradually expanded as the value of having healthcare professionals within the school setting became more apparent. School nurses now play a key role in fostering an inclusive educational environment, ensuring that all students have equal access to learning opportunities

[3]. Their presence in schools not only supports students with special needs but also contributes to the overall health and safety of the entire student body. This integration underscores the importance of school nurses as vital members of the educational community, working collaboratively to enhance student outcomes.

2. Key responsibilities of school nurses

School nurses in Greece are pivotal in conducting health assessments and screenings, ensuring the well-being of students. They actively engage in the early detection of health issues, facilitating timely interventions that can significantly impact a student's academic and social development [4]. By performing regular health checks, such as vision and hearing tests, school nurses can identify potential barriers to learning and help create individualized care plans. This proactive approach not only addresses immediate health concerns but also contributes to the overall development of students, enabling them to thrive in a school setting [5]. Additionally, these assessments serve as a foundation for health education initiatives, guiding students towards healthier lifestyles.

Management of chronic conditions is another critical responsibility of school nurses in Greek schools. They closely monitor students with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and epilepsy, ensuring that these students receive the necessary care and support during school hours [1]. School nurses collaborate with teachers and parents to develop comprehensive care plans tailored to each student's needs, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for all [6]. Their role extends beyond mere supervision; they educate students about their conditions, empowering them to manage their health more effectively. This empowerment is essential for fostering independence and facilitating the active participation of students with chronic conditions in the educational process [7].

In the realm of emergency response and first aid, school nurses are indispensable assets to Greek schools. They are trained to handle a wide array of emergency situations, from minor injuries to more serious health crises, providing immediate care that can be life-saving [8]. Their presence in schools ensures that students receive prompt medical attention, minimizing the potential for complications and ensuring a safe learning environment. School nurses also play a key role in educating school staff and students about emergency preparedness, creating a culture of safety and readiness [2]. Through drills and training sessions, they help instill confidence and competence in handling emergencies, thereby reinforcing the overall security framework within the school community.

3. Impact on student health and well-being

The role of school nurses in promoting healthy lifestyles among students in Greek schools is crucial and multifaceted. These professionals are tasked with fostering a healthy school environment by encouraging students to adopt habits that contribute to their overall well-being. Despite the lack of specific studies from the nurses' perspectives, their involvement is significant in various areas [9]. School nurses engage in activities such as organizing health education sessions, where they discuss essential topics like nutrition, physical activity, and the importance of maintaining a balanced lifestyle [10]. By doing so, they help students understand the long-term benefits of making healthy choices early in life. Additionally, they serve as role models, exemplifying healthy behaviors and attitudes that students can emulate. Through these efforts, school nurses not only improve students' health but also contribute to their balanced physical, mental, and social development, which is a core aspect of their role in Greek public schools [10].

School nurses in Greek schools provide invaluable mental health support to students, addressing a critical aspect of their overall well-being. Their presence in educational institutions allows them to identify and address mental health issues early, offering a safety net for students who may be struggling [7]. By providing a listening ear and professional guidance, school nurses help students navigate the complexities of adolescence and the challenges that come with it. They offer counseling services, create awareness about mental health topics, and facilitate referral processes for students who require additional support from mental health professionals. This proactive approach not only aids in the management of existing mental health issues but also helps in reducing stigma associated with seeking help. The ability of school nurses to integrate mental health support into their daily interactions with students reinforces the importance of holistic health care within the educational setting.

The prevention of communicable diseases is another vital responsibility undertaken by school nurses in Greek schools. They play a pivotal role in managing and controlling outbreaks, ensuring the safety and health of the student population [1]. By maintaining confidential health records, school nurses can track the health status of students and quickly identify potential risks or emerging health issues. Their proactive measures include educating students about hygiene practices, implementing vaccination programs, and coordinating with local health authorities during outbreaks [11]. These preventive strategies are essential in minimizing the spread of infections within school communities and preserving a healthy learning environment. Through their diligent work, school nurses not only safeguard individual students but also protect the broader school community from potential public health threats.

4. Collaboration with educational staff

Training and workshops for teachers are essential components of the collaboration between school nurses and educational staff in Greek schools. School nurses play a vital role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the health needs of students effectively. Through these training sessions, teachers gain insights into important health topics, such as nutrition and disease prevention, which directly impact students' overall well-being [1]. These workshops provide teachers with practical strategies to incorporate health education into their daily interactions with students, fostering a healthier school environment. Moreover, the collaboration between school nurses and teachers helps to create a supportive network that addresses the diverse health needs of students, ensuring that children with chronic health conditions receive the necessary accommodations for effective learning [12]. By empowering teachers through training and workshops, school nurses contribute to the holistic development of students, promoting a balanced approach to education that prioritizes health and well-being.

The development of health policies is another critical area where school nurses collaborate with educational staff in Greek schools. School nurses are instrumental in crafting comprehensive health policies that address the unique needs of the school community. These policies encompass a wide range of issues, including emergency health care, mental health support, and chronic disease management [2]. By working closely with educational staff, school nurses ensure that health policies are aligned with the school's educational goals and the needs of the students. This collaboration results in policies that not only safeguard the health of students but also enhance their educational experiences. For example, health policies may include protocols for managing medical emergencies, guidelines for supporting students with special health needs, and strategies for promoting mental well-being. The active involvement of school nurses in policy development ensures that health considerations are integrated into the school's overall framework, creating a supportive learning environment for all students [3].

Communication with parents and guardians is a pivotal aspect of the collaboration between school nurses and educational staff in Greek schools. School nurses serve as a crucial link

between the school and families, ensuring that parents are informed and involved in their children's health care. Through regular communication, school nurses provide updates on students' health status, discuss any concerns, and offer guidance on health-related matters [3]. This open line of communication helps to build trust and fosters a strong partnership between the school and families, ultimately benefiting the students. School nurses also play a role in educating parents about health issues, empowering them to make informed decisions regarding their children's well-being. By maintaining consistent and effective communication with parents and guardians, school nurses contribute to a collaborative approach to student health, reinforcing the importance of community involvement in promoting the health and well-being of students [13].

5. Contribution to public health goals

Immunization programs in Greek schools are significantly bolstered by the presence of school nurses, who play a vital role in promoting public health goals. These healthcare professionals actively work to improve vaccine uptake among school-aged children, addressing both parental concerns and misconceptions about vaccinations. Research suggests that school nurses are instrumental in identifying children's attitudes towards vaccination, which helps in tailoring strategies to enhance immunization rates [14]. By ensuring that students are up-to-date with their vaccines, school nurses help to prevent the outbreak of infectious diseases within the school environment, thereby safeguarding not only the health of individual students but also the broader community.

In addition to managing immunization programs, school nurses are pivotal in integrating health education into the curriculum, thereby promoting a well-rounded understanding of health among students. Their primary responsibility involves the education and promotion of health standards, aiming to improve both the physical and mental well-being of the school population [8]. School nurses contribute to the development of a health education curriculum that encompasses a wide range of topics, including nutrition, mental health, sexual education, and substance abuse prevention. By embedding these critical health topics into the school curriculum, they empower students with knowledge that can lead to healthier lifestyle choices and improved long-term health outcomes.

Monitoring and reporting health trends is another crucial aspect of the role of school nurses in Greek schools, which supports public health initiatives by ensuring timely identification and response to emerging health issues. School nurses take on the responsibility of tracking the health status of students, including monitoring chronic health conditions and identifying any unmet needs [15]. This continuous monitoring allows for the early detection of potential health issues, enabling prompt intervention and support. Through collaboration with other school staff and public health officials, school nurses contribute valuable data and insights that help shape health policies and programs. By maintaining detailed records and reports, they ensure that the health needs of students are addressed efficiently and effectively.

6. Addressing health inequalities

School nurses in Greek schools play a pivotal role in supporting vulnerable and at-risk students by providing essential healthcare services and interventions tailored to their unique needs. They are often employed in special education schools, particularly at the request of parents who seek additional support for their children [2]. This targeted approach allows school nurses to address health disparities by ensuring that students with chronic health conditions receive the necessary care and attention. Furthermore, school nurses collaborate closely with educational staff to implement health-related initiatives, ensuring that these students can thrive in a supportive environment. By maintaining immunization compliance and monitoring the health

status of these students, school nurses contribute significantly to reducing health inequalities and promoting a healthier school population [1].

Access to healthcare resources is a critical aspect of the role of school nurses in Greek schools. They bridge the gap between students and the healthcare system, facilitating access to necessary medical attention and resources [16]. Despite the lack of school-based health services, school nurses ensure that students can connect with primary healthcare providers when needed. This connection is crucial for students who may not have the means or knowledge to seek medical care independently. School nurses also play a vital role in health education, providing information on essential topics such as nutrition and disease prevention, thereby empowering students to make informed health decisions [1]. By doing so, they help level the playing field for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Advocacy for health equity is a fundamental responsibility of school nurses in Greece, as they strive to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to achieve optimal health outcomes. They actively participate in creating policies and programs that address the unique health needs of the school population, thereby fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment [5]. School nurses are instrumental in raising awareness about the importance of equitable access to healthcare services within the school community. They work tirelessly to highlight the gaps in service provision, advocating for policies that ensure fair distribution of resources and services [7]. Through these efforts, school nurses contribute to the development of a more just and healthy school system, where every student has the chance to succeed and thrive.

7. Challenges faced by school nurses

School nurses in Greece face significant challenges due to limited resources and funding, impacting their ability to effectively support students' health and well-being. Despite their critical role in promoting pupils' balanced physical, mental, and social development, school nurses often operate within constraints that hinder their efforts [17]. Limited access to medical supplies and inadequate funding for health programs can restrict the scope of services they can provide. This scarcity of resources often forces school nurses to prioritize urgent health needs over comprehensive care, leaving gaps in preventive health measures and ongoing student support. These challenges underline the need for increased investment in school health services to empower nurses to fulfill their roles more effectively and contribute to a healthier school environment.

Another pressing challenge for school nurses in Greece is the high student-to-nurse ratio, which significantly affects their ability to manage students' health needs efficiently. With a limited number of nurses available, each professional is responsible for the health care of a large student population, leading to overextended workloads and reduced effectiveness in addressing individual student concerns [2]. This imbalance hampers the nurses' capacity to provide timely and personalized care, as they struggle to juggle numerous health assessments, treatments, and follow-ups within the confines of their limited time. Consequently, students may not receive the attention and care they require, which can impact their overall health and learning outcomes. Addressing this issue through the recruitment of additional nursing staff is essential to ensure that all students have access to the health services they need.

In addition to dealing with limited resources and high student-to-nurse ratios, school nurses in Greece must navigate the complexities of balancing multiple roles and responsibilities. Beyond their primary duty of managing students' health, school nurses are often tasked with administrative functions, health education initiatives, and collaboration with school staff on health-related programs [4]. This multifaceted role requires them to possess a wide range of skills and expertise, yet the demands of these diverse responsibilities can be overwhelming. The need to

shift focus between direct patient care and broader health promotion efforts can lead to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. It is crucial to provide school nurses with adequate support and resources, enabling them to manage their varied roles effectively and maintain high standards of student health care.

8. Professional development and training

Continuing education opportunities are crucial for school nurses, enabling them to stay updated with the latest advancements in child health care. In Greece, school nurses are responsible for promoting the health and well-being of students, and ongoing education is vital to fulfill this role effectively [5]. By participating in workshops, seminars, and online courses, nurses can enhance their skills and knowledge, which is essential for addressing the diverse health needs of students. Moreover, access to continuing education ensures that school nurses can implement evidence-based practices within their daily responsibilities. These opportunities not only improve the quality of care provided but also contribute to the professional growth and job satisfaction of school nurses.

Specialized training in child health is another key aspect of the professional development of school nurses in Greece. A comprehensive understanding of child health issues allows nurses to provide targeted interventions and support to students. Training programs focusing on areas like chronic health conditions, mental health, and developmental disorders equip nurses with the expertise needed to manage complex health situations [12]. This specialized knowledge is particularly important in special education settings, where nurses are often employed at the request of parents to address the unique health needs of their children [2]. As a result, specialized training helps school nurses to deliver personalized care and improve health outcomes for students.

Networking and community involvement are essential for school nurses to enhance their impact and effectiveness within Greek schools. By engaging with other health professionals and community organizations, nurses can create a supportive network that facilitates resource sharing and collaboration [18]. This involvement not only broadens their professional horizons but also helps them to stay informed about public health initiatives and policies that affect school health programs. Additionally, active participation in community events and health campaigns allows school nurses to advocate for children's health and well-being, thereby reinforcing their role as integral members of the school community. Networking also provides opportunities for mentorship and peer support, which are invaluable for professional development.

9. Technological advancements in school nursing

In recent years, the use of digital health records has become an integral part of school nursing in Greece. This technological advancement allows school nurses to efficiently manage and access student health information, which significantly enhances their ability to provide timely and accurate care [19]. By having a comprehensive view of a student's health history, school nurses can make informed decisions that contribute to improved health outcomes. The implementation of electronic health records (EHR) also facilitates better communication between school nurses and other healthcare providers, ensuring a coordinated approach to student health management. Additionally, digital records reduce the likelihood of errors associated with traditional paper-based systems, thereby increasing the overall efficiency of school health services.

Telemedicine services have revolutionized the way school nurses in Greece deliver healthcare, especially in remote or underserved areas [20]. This technology enables school nurses to consult with healthcare professionals and specialists without the need for students to leave the

school premises. Through video conferencing and other digital communication tools, students can receive medical advice and even diagnoses, which might not be readily available on-site. Telemedicine also supports the continuity of care for students with chronic conditions, as it allows for regular follow-ups and monitoring. The integration of telemedicine in schools not only expands access to healthcare but also empowers school nurses to address a broader range of health issues effectively.

The introduction of health monitoring devices in Greek schools marks another significant step forward in school nursing. These devices allow for continuous and real-time monitoring of students' health metrics, such as blood glucose levels for those with diabetes [21]. By utilizing wearable technology and other innovative health monitoring tools, school nurses can promptly identify any deviations from normal health parameters and take immediate action. This proactive approach to health management helps prevent complications and ensures that students remain healthy and ready to learn. Furthermore, the data collected from these devices provide valuable insights into students' health trends, enabling school nurses to tailor interventions and support to meet individual needs effectively.

10. Policy recommendations for enhancing school nursing

Increasing funding and resources for school nurses in Greece is paramount for enhancing their effectiveness and reach within educational institutions. Adequate funding allows for the hiring of full-time school nurses, which is essential for improving health outcomes, such as asthma management, particularly in underserved schools [7]. This improvement can significantly reduce school absenteeism, thereby promoting better educational engagement and academic performance. By securing more resources, schools can also provide the necessary medical supplies and equipment that enable nurses to perform their duties efficiently. Increased funding supports continuous professional development for school nurses, ensuring they are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills to address various health issues among students. Implementing these measures can help bridge the gap in health services available to students, fostering a healthier and more conducive learning environment.

Establishing standardized protocols for school nursing practices can significantly enhance the quality and consistency of care provided to students in Greek schools. Currently, nursing practice in Greece faces challenges related to nurse training and education, as well as the regulation of duties and professional development [22]. By developing and implementing clear, standardized guidelines, school nurses can provide consistent and reliable health services across different educational settings. Standardized protocols would also facilitate better documentation and communication, enabling nurses to efficiently share information with teachers, parents, and healthcare providers. These protocols can include specific procedures for managing common health issues, detailed emergency response plans, and guidelines for health education initiatives. Implementing standardized protocols ensures that all students receive equitable health care, regardless of their school or location, promoting overall student well-being and safety.

Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration is vital for maximizing the impact of school nurses on student health and development in Greece. Active interaction with the educational community highlights the integral role of school nurses and underscores the importance of considering the socioeconomic context in health interventions [7]. By fostering collaboration between school nurses, teachers, and other health and social care professionals, schools can create a more holistic approach to student well-being. Multidisciplinary collaboration is particularly important for the education of pupils with special educational needs, as it ensures that all aspects of a student's health and educational requirements are addressed [22]. This collaborative approach can lead to more effective health education programs, improved management of health conditions, and better support for students facing social or emotional

challenges. Establishing strong interdisciplinary partnerships enhances the capacity of school nurses to contribute positively to the health and development of all students.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of school nurses in Greek schools is indispensable to the overall health and well-being of students. From their historical development to their integration within the educational system, school nurses have evolved into key figures responsible for a variety of essential health services, such as health assessments, chronic condition management, and emergency response. Their impact extends beyond individual student care to encompass the promotion of healthy lifestyles, mental health support, and the prevention of communicable diseases, thereby fostering a healthier school environment. Collaboration with educational staff, parents, and public health initiatives enhances their effectiveness in addressing student health inequalities and advocating for health equity. However, challenges such as limited resources and high student-to-nurse ratios hinder their ability to fully realize their potential. To bolster the contributions of school nurses, it is crucial to invest in their professional development, utilize technological advancements, and implement policy recommendations aimed at increasing funding and enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration. By prioritizing the role of school nurses, Greece can ensure a more comprehensive approach to student health that ultimately contributes to the well-being of the entire community.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

References

- [1] School Nurse – Pinewood the International School. www.pinewood.gr/student-life/school-nurse.
- [2] School Health Services and Health Education Curricula. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10298396/.
- [3] The Role of School Nurses in the School Inclusion. www.webmail.internationalsped.com.
- [4] Exploring the role of school nurses in primary schools. www.journal-ene.gr.
- [5] Exploring educationalists' views on the need for school. www.researchgate.net.
- [6] Care and Safety of Schoolchildren with Type 1 Diabetes. www.glikos-planitis.gr.
- [7] The Role of School Nurses in the School Inclusion. www.researchgate.net.
- [8] School Nurses and Their Role in Emergency Health. www.proquest.com/docview/1114167364/F317995A483242F3PQ/3.
- [9] Health promotion: The view of school nurses in Greece (n.d.). www.researchgate.net.
- [10] Exploring educationalists' views on the need for school. www.researchgate.net.
- [11] Exploring educationalists' views on the need for school nurses. www.researchgate.net.
- [12] The Role of School Nurses in the School Inclusion. www.internationalsped.com/ijse/article/view/1411.

- [13] Parents' perception of the school nurse's role. www.pediatricshealthjournal.com/articles/japch-aid1021.php.
- [14] Vaccination: school nurses' and children's attitudes. www.nursingtimes.net.
- [15] Health and Wellness / The Role of a School Nurse. www.greececsd.org/Page/589.
- [16] School Health Services and Health Education Curricula. www.researchgate.net.
- [17] The role of the school nurse in special education. www.vima-asklipiou.gr/en/articles/834/.
- [18] School Nurse Electronic Health Record Access – PMC. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9451949/.
- [19] Telehealth in the School Setting: An Integrative Review. www.journals.sagepub.com.
- [20] Greek School Nurses' Confidence with Diabetes Devices. www.cureus.com.
- [21] Greece – Strengthening health systems through nursing. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK545717/.
- [22] Collaboration and integration of services in Greek special. www.eclass.uoa.gr.

