

The Emerging Role of the School Nurse in New York City 1902: A Historical Analysis to Inform Practice Today

Purpose: This historical study investigates the evolving role and implementation of school nursing in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. This comprehensive historical analysis of school nursing demonstrates that the emergence of the school nurse role met the health care needs of poor immigrant children and their families that previously went unmet. The data demonstrates that understanding the core fundamental concepts of school nursing from its origins and the significance of the emergence of community support for the role of the school nurse at the turn of the twentieth century can inform current policy to support school nursing and school health reform today.

Methodology Design Description: Traditional historical methods; social history framework.

Major primary and secondary sources: Primary sources included The Lillian D. Wald Papers New York Public Library, Lillian D. Wald Papers Columbia University Library. Published works by Lillian Wald, Lavinia Dock, Lina Rogers and other nursing leaders at the turn of the twentieth century were evaluated. Select primary source newspapers and journals included *The American Journal of Nursing*, *The Public Health Nurse*, *The New York Times*, and the *Charities and the Commons*. Secondary sources included government websites, nursing and history journals and textbooks.

Findings and conclusions: The school nursing movement in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century became a transformative mission to promote both individual and community health. School nurses became an integral part of the community they served; they developed collaborative relationships with parents, physicians and educators. The first school nurses provided a clear definition of their role and capabilities, and strong evidence regarding the benefits of their position for the school children and the greater community. In doing so they obtained parental, physician, school and community support. Once the larger community understood the benefits of their position, communities were willing to pay for their services.

Rationale and significance/Implications: Evidence presented in this study demonstrated that at the turn of the twentieth century, school nurses were one of the most important figures in the promotion of health and educational opportunities for an entire generation of marginalized children. During the Progressive Era, 1890 – 1920, school nurses became an invaluable component of the school health reform movement. In doing so, they altered the process of how children attended school from exclusionary in nature to inclusive. In this manner, school nurses improved the well-being of the entire community. This historical analysis demonstrated that school nurses succeeded at the above endeavors. This evidence has mostly gone unrecognized.