

Returned to School and Ready to Learn: Examining Early School Nurse Initiatives to Promote Student and Community Health, New York City 1902

Purpose: This historical study investigates the implementation and evolving role of school nursing in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. This comprehensive historical analysis 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. This included the management of contagious diseases during infectious epidemics. 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 COVID 19 attendance policies to support student school attendance and community health today.

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

Major primary 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*.

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 students, parents, physicians and educators to ensure that following a medical exclusion, students safely returned to school to receive their opportunity for an education. 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. Since the COVID 19 Pandemic, the need for a nurse in every school is indisputable. Understanding how historical school nurses promoted student health and safe return to school can inform the practice of current school nurses today.