

Never more relevant, never more needed



School and public health nurses have never been more relevant and more needed than now. While there is still a dearth of resources and funding for school nursing services, other funding sources might be accessible, Sharon White explains.

Sharon White OBE, CEO SAPHNA

There have been times in the past when the title 'public health nurse' has resulted in negative connotations from the media and the public, associating our workforce with sanitation and head lice alone! And while these two examples are indeed elements, our wider role comprises health promotion, prevention and protection of school-aged children, families and community.

Right now we need to amplify, celebrate and embrace our postgraduate public health nursing qualifications, experience, leadership, knowledge and skills and optimise its use; it has never been more needed! Who else provides that crucial link between home and school, is trusted and known by children young people, families and schools, and, crucially during COVID-19, is an expert in the field of infection prevention and control?

During COVID-19, I have had the opportunity to deliver education webinars to thousands of senior school leaders and their staff on trauma-informed practice, understanding and implementing the Department for Education (DfE) COVID-19 policy and 'systems of control' regarding health protection, our 'unseen, unheard, unknown' safeguarding challenges and much more. Out of this has come a clear call for more from their school nursing service as they better understand and further recognise you as the system leader they need and, right now, who is invaluable to the health, wellbeing and safety of their school population. The



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issues are, as ever, resources and funding and, with continued cuts to services, this feels beyond a tall order.

However, schools have been awarded various and substantial pots of monies from the DfE to support them during COVID-19. Examples include:

- Exceptional costs associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) catch-up premium (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium>)
- £8m programme to boost pupil and teacher wellbeing ([https://www.gov.uk/government/news/8m-programme-to-](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/8m-programme-to-boost-pupil-and-teacher-wellbeing)

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School leaders have autonomy and discretion in how they spend much of this. Looking at the funding purpose, you are already providing much of this and certainly have the skills to offer more. Imagine how useful a member of your service would be based in school during this highly stressful time; this, I believe, could reap substantial dividends for students, staff, families and wider communities.

Where, I hear you ask, do we get the additional workforce from?

In the COVID-19 call out to return to practice we had over 400 SCPHN, thousands of qualified nurses and our fabulous Year 3 student nurses who stepped up to the plate; we could use many of these amazing colleagues usefully who, I feel, would also welcome the challenge as part of their ongoing nursing contribution

to the global pandemic.

SAPHNA is working tirelessly across all agencies including with school leaders and their unions, to further explore funding opportunity and will also be also submitting our ask to the forthcoming Government Spending Review which includes the public health grant.

So now, how will you get your place too at that table extolling your irreplaceable value, building upon the numerous SN COVID-19 solution-focused offers as an essential part of the response for our children young and young people's future health and wellbeing? The time is now!

FURTHER INFORMATION

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