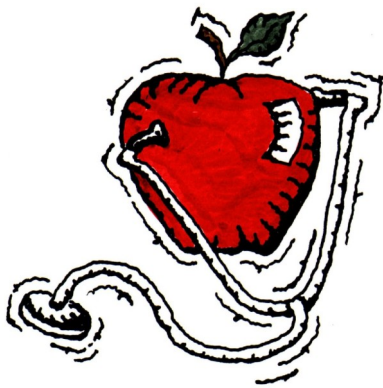


Health Care Transition Services

Health care transition is defined as “the purposeful, planned process that supports adolescents and young adults with special health care needs (SHCN) and disabilities to move from a child-centered (pediatric) health care system to adult-oriented health care practices, providers, programs and facilities.”



What would be the focus of health care transition services?

- Management of daily health care needs.
- Skill sets needed to assume responsibility for health care needs.
- Communicating needs to health care professionals.
- Health care curriculum, including sexuality/reproductive needs.
- Promotion of self-determination and self-advocacy.
- Transfer of care from pediatric to adult practitioners.

What does health care have to do with educational transition plans?

Young people need to maintain a level of health in order to succeed in school, work, and community living. The adult health care system has a built-in expectation of independence from patients, and the student’s transition plan should incorporate needed supports while fostering as much independence as possible.

Students with SHCN need to learn to manage aspects of their own health care needs, and to take more responsibility for decisions related to those needs.

As young adults with SHCN and disabilities seek services in the adult health care system, they need a particular skill set and support system in order to chart their course successfully.

- Identification of health insurance needs and financial obstacles.
- Access to continued and uninterrupted health insurance coverage.
- Making use of available community resources and supports when necessary.
- Identification of accommodations needed in order to function more effectively in the school or work environment, and effectively advocating for them.



Why would Health Care Transition Services be effective for my students?

Probably the biggest advantage of having a school-centered Health Care Transition program is the ability it offers to reach a large percentage of students with disabilities. Other benefits afforded by the school setting include:

- The skill sets that students need to manage their own health care are similar to other expectations of independence that are traditionally taught in educational transition programs.
- The school provides a comfortable, practical, and structured learning environment for students to practice necessary skills.
- Students have opportunities for multidisciplinary supports to incorporate health care goals.
- The mandated transition IEP process makes it possible to coordinate health care goals with other essential life skills.
- The educational team is available to provide problem-solving resources and support for all aspects of the transition process.

What difficulties do my students face in the adult health care system?

One of the main problems that students with SHCN and disabilities face is the shortage of adult care providers who are trained in the treatment of pediatric-onset health conditions. Compounding this problem is the fact that there are minimal financial incentives for a provider to take on big caseloads of patients with special needs: reimbursements are low, and the time-intensive needs of SHCN patients can be seen as being less profitable.

Another issue with which transitioning students must contend is parental resistance to letting go of control. In order for the adolescent/young adult to move toward supervising his or her own health care, parents and support systems need to move from a mindset of “manager” to “consultant.”

There are a host of other issues that may impact a student’s transition into the adult health care world. There may be cultural, transportation, health insurance, and financial obstacles standing in the way of their independence in taking care of their own health care requirements.

The need to facilitate this process — ideally by the time a student reaches the age of eleven — has been widely acknowledged, but is largely nonexistent in terms of implementation. This is clearly an area where we can enhance the future quality of life for our students by giving them the tools they will need to navigate the adult health care system.

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How would Health Care Transition Services affect school nursing?

Health care professionals can provide needed insight as to accessibility issues (including emergency evacuation and lockdown plans), necessary accommodations, and expected medical concerns and outcomes. By actively assisting in curriculum development and the implementation of health care transition goals and plans, school nurses can have an even greater influence on enhancing everyday classroom life for the student and for the educational team as a whole.

Nurses also have the expertise to educate and counsel transitioning students on such topics as nutrition, exercise, hygiene, drug and alcohol prevention, sexuality, and reproductive concerns as they relate to their individual SHCN and/or disability.

Coordination of care as the family transitions from pediatric to adult care is a vital service that the school nurse is in a unique

position to offer. Nurses have knowledge or can gain access to information needed to acquire or maintain health insurance coverage. For young adults with SHCN and/or disability, a major deterrent to getting and keeping a job is the fear of losing health insurance provided by a public service.

Health and wellness are very important aspects of life. By becoming more involved with transition planning, school nurses can positively impact students’ well-being, not only during the years they spend in school, but for the rest of their adult lives.

