

Nebraska elementary school nurse perceptions regarding menstrual hygiene management education

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Menarche has been a stigmatized topic amongst young people, which can affect the school setting with absenteeism and academic success. To provide a positive experience, students should receive education about menstrual health and hygiene in elementary school. Most of this education falls to the school nurse, but it is unknown how comfortable elementary school nurses are with the topic area and health pedagogy. While school nurses have education regarding menstruation and reproduction, many may have not had any professional development on how to communicate properly with elementary students regarding topics like menstrual hygiene and/or teaching about this to transgender youth. Nurses have reported not being prepared enough in their nursing programs to teach about menstrual health and hygiene to elementary students. The purpose of this study was to explore elementary school nurses' perceptions and abilities regarding menstrual health and hygiene education. The Social Cognitive Theory was used to develop a questionnaire to assess self-efficacy (29 items), reinforcements (five items), behavioral capability (six items), and observational learning (two items). The questionnaire also included items assessing school nurses' attitudes regarding the importance of menstrual health and hygiene education and if free hygiene products were available to students, as well as demographic information. The online survey was emailed to 123 elementary school nurses in Nebraska. Data were analyzed with SPSS Version 21. A 39% response rate yielded responses that elementary school nurses overall felt confident in teaching menstrual health but were not familiar with some sustainable hygiene products. Some school nurses needed more information on pedagogical practices such as implementing technology and health education skills. Almost 80% of school nurses wanted more professional development on this topic. To make school nurses successful in teaching menstrual health, professional development should be offered to this population. Though there have been advances to equity regarding menstrual health and hygiene, more focus on school nurses is needed, since most of the education around this topic falls to them.