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The role of the school and student health care in obesity prevention

Every school has a public health nurse in Finland. 20 public health nurses (=school nurses) and 3 school doctors are working at the school and student health care in Seinäjoki. One nurse takes care of one big school or a few smaller schools. Work is based on the law and regulation. The Social and Health Ministry controls the work.

A school nurse is in a very important role at the school. They are a health care experts and health promoters. School nurses do preventive work and give personal counseling. They do the health examinations and provide the health education according to the regulation. They strive to recognize distractions early enough, to diagnose, to treat and to guide treatment. Health promotion, health education and early interventions are their normal work.

At the comprehensive school, the school nurse checks every pupil once a year and completes a health examination. The school doctor checks every pupil three times (in 1st, 5th and 8th grades) and completes the wide health examination. It means that a pupil, her/his guardian(s), a school doctor and a school nurse meet and talk about the child's health and wellbeing and wellbeing at school, hobbies, family's life style etc. At the upper secondary school and vocational school, the school nurse checks all 1st year students and completes a health examination. Students undergo also a doctor's health inspection during 1st or 2nd year. At the university of Applied Sciences, health examinations are voluntary.

The weight paths formalized 7-8 years ago in Seinäjoki. All school nurses follow the guidelines systematically. In health examination, school nurses check weight and height every year. Then they check the body mass index. At the comprehensive school, school nurses have a conversation with the overweight pupils. In the discussion, they talk about meal rhythm, quality and quantity of food, quantity and frequency of fatty and sweet snacks, hobbies, TV and computer games, time spent in social media, sleeping etc. If a pupil is obese/ severe obese, there is an intensive co-operation with a family. They have an appointment also with the school doctor. Very important question is: What changes will the family intend to make? The goals are setting together with the family. It is also possible to get a referral to the dietician/physiotherapist/psychologist. The continuation of the check-ups can be discussed and agreed with the family.

At the student health care services, the school nurse has a conversation with an overweight/obese student. They talk for example about exercise, nutrition habits, alcohol consumption, sleeping, stress and a situation in life. Family anamnesis is also important. The school nurses check blood pressure (double) and if the BMI is thirty or more, they make a referral to blood tests. The continuation of the check-ups discussed and agreed with the student. The student sets the goals for weight loss and the school nurse supports and encourages and provides information if needed. The most important issue is the motivation to change life style.