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**Representation: National Forum of School Health Educators**

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The emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people is a significant public health issue, if figures continue to rise at its current rate the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicates by 2020 it will be one of five leading causes of childhood illness, disability and death (WHO 2004). Whilst it is not definitive why this public health issue continues to rise, several triggers have been associated with the possible cause of deterioration in mental health for young people such as; pressure to achieve educationally, perfection relating to body image, consumerism, competition for jobs in a rising unemployment market, family breakdown and access to social media twenty fours a day (Young Minds 2014). Aligned to this is evidence that the adult brain does not fully develop until the age of 25 years thus creating a combination of factors which make young people susceptible to developing mental health issues during this formative stage.

Consequently this has seen a paradigm shift in the school nursing service over the last decade with an ever increasing focus on the emotional health of children and young people being central to their role. This is as a result of their involvement in a range of complex psychological and emotional disorders in children as young as five experiencing anxiety and displaying signs of conduct disorder through to adolescents suffering from eating disorders, deliberately self-harming and depression. Nonetheless school nurses are in a unique position to identify, support and manage children and young people with their emotional health through their public health role which involves early intervention, health prevention and education (Haddad et al 2010) across all

service levels from universal to universal partnership plus (Department of Health, DH 2012a).

However despite this being an extensive aspect of the school nursing role, practitioners report concerns relating to a lack of confidence, training and skills thus creating barriers to supporting children and young people with mental health issues confidently. Therefore the development of continuous professional development (CPD) mental health training for school nurses is an absolute necessity in the current healthcare landscape in order to sustain, improve and increase professional competence (Cooke & James 2009). As although school nurses complete mental health components throughout the Specialist Community Public Health (SCPHN) programme during their training to become Specialist Practitioners, there is still a commitment to lifelong learning through undertaking CPD in order to ensure skills, knowledge and training are up to date and correlate with the current service needs (NMC 2004).

The implementation of the emotional health and wellbeing care pathway (DH 2012a) and the recommendation from the Children and Young People's Forum (DH 2012) that a survey on mental health in children and young people should be commissioned and published annually are particularly encouraging. This will raise the profile of addressing the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people through improving the evidence base and providing

a framework for local authorities and health and wellbeing boards to meet current and future need (DH 2012a).

Nonetheless in accordance local education training boards and commissioners will be required to support inter-professional learning and staff development to address the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people needs locally through the establishment for CPD courses for school nurses. This will assist school nurses to develop the skills and confidence required to assess, manage and support young people experiencing psychological and emotional disorders as part of their challenging role on a day to day basis. Hence therefore the focus of any CPD courses should be based upon experiential learning which supports practice through reflection and the utilisation of teaching and learning strategies such as role play, problem based learning, case studies and training in cognitive behavioural and solution focussed psychological therapies (Cooke & James 2009) to ensure that training is fit for practice to enhance service delivery for all.

**646 Words**

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