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Donna Mazyck: Hello, I'm Donna Mazyck. And this is School Nurse Chat, the podcast of the National Association of School Nurses. On today's podcast, we'll be discussing improving over the counter medication safety in your school community. I am happy to welcome today on School Nurse Chat, Tami Jakubowski, who has her doctorate in nursing practice. Tami's an associate professor at the college of New Jersey. Her clinical background includes pediatric nursing, school nursing, and she's a certified pediatric nurse practitioner. Also, with us today is Ainsley Erdner. Ainsley is a student who works with a community anti-drug coalition, and she has done a lot of work in advocacy related to over the counter medicine safety. So we want to speak with you both today and I welcome you.

Tami Jakubowski: Thank you.

Ainsley Erdner: Thank you.

Donna Mazyck: Let's start with you, Tami. What's the role of the school nurse in health education, especially related to over the counter, which we'll be calling OTC medication safety.

Tami Jakubowski: So 25% of children have chronic conditions and many of these children require medication during the school day. Other students require medication for acute health problems, medications for life threatening emergencies, or as needed PRN medications, some of which are over the counter medications. These can be for transient health issues, discomfort, or other symptoms they go to the school nurse with. In each state, state level guidelines summarize regulations or dictate standards that need to be followed within the school system. And school nurses vary their practices relating to medication from building to building at times. The school nursing evidence based clinical practice guideline medication administration in schools, guides school policy and provides evidence related to medication administration that promotes the health, safety and achievement for children who receive medication in school. Specifically, the school nursing evidence based clinical practice guideline improves the structure, processes and outcomes of medication administration in schools. This allows school nurses to utilize updated guideline information, to educate students regarding proper over the counter education and medication administration.

Donna Mazyck: It's very helpful to know. And I want to share with those who are listening, that those clinical guidelines or medication administration in schools can be found

on the nasn.org website. Ainsley, I'd love to find out your story about how you got interested in being an advocate for OTC medication safety. Can you share your story, your experience with that?

Ainsley Erdner: In high school, I decided to join a local community coalition to me called, Drug Free Cecil. And within that, we were partners of CADCA, like Donna had mentioned in the beginning, which is the community anti-drug coalition of America, and they are sponsors of the over-the-counter medicine safety training program. So while I was in the Drug Free Cecil program, I got the chance to attend multiple CADCA events and trainings and get trained as a trainer, basically.

And I was able to take that back into my community, where we started a program for over the counter medicine. And we went to an adventure camp in our community that hosts all of the sixth grade students for a week. And we were able to go for multiple weeks and educate every sixth grader in our county on the curriculum. And since then, we have used that curriculum multiple times. We have trained multiple more youth within the coalition I have since graduated and moved on from the coalition. But I was still able to teach that curriculum again through a summer camp. Once it got approved for elementary level, we were able to spread that to our elementary schoolers, third through fifth grade, both last year and this year throughout the summer. So that's a little bit of the trainings I've done and some of the background behind it and the youth that we have reached with that curriculum.

Donna Mazyck: That's pretty impressive, Ainsley, that you were able to provide that peer education. I imagine sometimes sixth graders would preferred to listen to the high school or college student than some of the adults in their world. Did you do some of that kind of, well, not teaching as much as having discussions with your peers about OTC medicine safety?

Ainsley Erdner: Yes. The curriculum actually, I feel is very good at combining a lot of interaction, as well as teaching. There is a lot of physical posters and interactive activities within the lessons that allow you to kind of interact one-on-one with the students and start more discussions, like you said. A lot of those lessons are question based. So we kind of want to test their knowledge. It actually starts with a pre-test and ends with the post-test. And that was honestly my biggest takeaway from those trainings and those lessons was the improvement that we saw. And I would completely agree that it worked much better from kind of a peer to peer aspect. Even though I may be a little bit older than them, they take it in a lot more when it comes from someone who's not so far out of reach in terms of life experiences. The interaction was great. And like I said, those results, the difference in the end of what they knew, even with my elementary schoolers, the amount they knew was quite impressive and the amount they learned as well was amazing.

Donna Mazyck: That's wonderful. So good to hear Ainsley, the outcomes that you saw. Now, Tami, we've talked about your professional chops. You are well educated at the

height of your clinical degree and you're a parent. So let's talk about your parent role. What do you do at home to promote OTC medication safety with your children?

Tami Jakubowski: One of the things I've observed as a pediatric nurse practitioner is I've seen parents misinterpret directions, which have led to accidental overdose of over the counter medications. So I think that one of the biggest takeaways is providing written instructions, making sure that parents understand how to read the labels and also including proper dosing information. So parents need to be aware that that needs to be carefully read and applied to their children. In addition, medications need to be safely stored up out of reach of young children and all children in teens should be educated to always communicate with their parents prior to self dosing over the counter medications for any reason.

Donna Mazyck: So just following up with that, Tami. What should you do if someone accidentally misuses a medication an over the counter medication, they may take too much or how could accidentally swallow meds when they're not supposed to, what do you do?

Tami Jakubowski: So prevention is key, especially with young children, many medications look similar to candy that the children can be familiar with or are really colorful and pretty. So parents always need to be aware of the child's developmental level and they're understanding of medications because these two factors combined impact the child's ability to find a medication and to accidentally ingest it as well as impacts the child's understanding of the proper use.

Ainsley Erdner: Some of those things that Tami mentioned are actually some of the key points of what we try to teach these kids about safe storage and the drug fact label and so on. And I'll stress the drug facts label and kind of mention like what Tami was saying. The understanding is so important to note, depending on their age, and what they have access to in their homes. So making sure that our kids in our community really understood how to read that label so that in the chance that they were alone or got their selves into a situation and they were taking medicine, they could understand it and take it safely if they needed to.

We always talked also in the case that an accident happened, that label is also going to give you that information on who you need to call about questions about the medication, poison control center, things like that. We do discuss those things with our children in the case that things do happen. They are kids, like Tami said, that those medicines can often be mistaked, but again, prevention is a huge part of that and making sure that they have that education before they're put into one of those situations, making sure parents are educated or whoever is in the house about keeping those things out of reach or enforcing that permission needs to be granted before they are able to dose it.

Donna Mazyck: That's very, very true. And Tami and Ainsley made the case for prevention. So making sure that OTC medication proper use, storage, handling is so important

to teach before young people need to use it. Tami, let's move deeper into this. What are some important things to watch out for to avoid accidental ingestion?

Tami Jakubowski: One of the most surprising things to many is the dangers of incorrect acetaminophen dosing. In fact, the most common call to poison control centers is due to accidental acetaminophen overdose, which accounts for a hundred thousand calls and over 50,000 emergency room visits annually. So students, parents, children need to learn to read labels for dosing information and if unsure to check with their healthcare provider or pharmacist for clarification. Again, storing medications properly out of the reach of children, especially children that are too young to understand. And also recognizing that teens are also at increased risk of abusing some over the counter medications, such as cough medicine due to the artificial high that they can experience due to the main ingredient in some cough medications.

Donna Mazyck: Tami, those are really important tips that you gave. Are there any other OTC medicine safety tips that you would give to a student who's interested in over the counter medicine safety?

Tami Jakubowski: Absolutely. As a nursing faculty member, educating student nurses on pediatric growth and development and immersing the nursing students in school based clinical experiences helps to educate the next generation of nurses. Nursing students provide health education to children attending a local afterschool program and often send information home for the children to share with their parents. Other strategies that can be used that students can learn information and then share with families include, distributing information through parent newsletters, school websites, social media accounts, and other means of electronic communication that the younger generation is very capable of and can teach many users who aren't as savvy.

Donna Mazyck: So school nurses and student nurses can actually extend their region to the community with those strategies you just gave us.

Tami Jakubowski: Absolutely.

Donna Mazyck: Ainsley, from your experience in teaching third through sixth graders, what are some over the counter medicine safety tips that you would give to a student who is interested in medicine safety like you were when you were eager and still are, of course.

Ainsley Erdner: First, I second everything Tami said, all of those things are super critical. And another thing that I was thinking that stuck out to me was, not only do we sort need to understand the level of education that they have on these things. I think it's important to communicate the risks with them because that is one thing that they are largely unaware of, is the amount of risks that those simple medicines that we buy from the store actually hold. And also kind of hearing out our kids that we may be around. A lot of the questions we got asked is, it's just simple. I

don't feel good so I take this or what if mom doesn't think that I actually need medicine? I'm okay. Things like that. So actually being able to hear them out, I think is one of the most important parts during those lessons. They had a lot of questions and they wanted a lot of answers.

And what I have learned with working with kids the most is that they just want a little understanding sometimes. So I think just entertaining those questions and things like that. And starting those conversations, initiating those things is probably what's going to benefit us the most. They're actually really interested in those things. Along with OTC, I taught tobacco prevention, opioid prevention and things like that. And these are things that hit close to home. You know what I mean? They're aware of these things going on in the world, someone at home smokes, or they see these medications in their cabinet every day. So it's really important for us to kind of initiate those conversations because they may not be getting initiated somewhere else by someone else.

Donna Mazyck: That's a word to the wise, do the talking, just open up for conversation. And that is excellent for the younger students that you were teaching. What about with your peers? Does it work the same way in terms of just bringing up the topic?

Ainsley Erdner: I would say same and different in many ways. I mean, as you grow older as a teenager, I think many of my peers, you become more stubborn about those things or you already know whatever, you're old enough. But one thing I noticed a lot was being in a drug free coalition through high school wasn't always the most popular pick that people would go for, but that alone started those conversations.

It was actually funny because if someone ever my age brought it up to me, whether they were complimenting me or making a funny joke about the work I did, it started a conversation about the work I did. I took that as a point, whether they meant it that way or not, they brought it up. So even if that was my way in, that was my opening. I think that I spread a lot of education that way. And I also ended up doing a lot of recruiting that way. So I do feel like it does pay off that peer-to-peer aspect, but it is definitely more of a challenge once you get towards the high school ages. But we did pretty well in our county when it comes to getting kids to join, but it is definitely not enough of a popular topic that people should be talking about.

Donna Mazyck: Well, I appreciate you having the courage to bring up the topic. Tami, is there anything you would like to share, any follow up for school nurses, anything you want to leave with them or to parents?

Tami Jakubowski: I think overall, the most important thing is to be aware of your child's capabilities, as well as their understanding of medication safety. So always looking at the child's developmental level, again. And also looking at, do they understand that they shouldn't help themselves to medication and that they should be speaking with their parents before they take something. As school nurses, I think it's important just to educate children in the school system to

include that in your health education, and also looking at the age of the child, whether it's primarily prevention, whether it is dose related. I think all those topics are so important to incorporate within health education throughout the curriculum.

Ainsley Erdner: Just kind of bouncing off of that. The same thing, be understanding that they are actually a lot smarter than we think. So even at first I was a little surprised about teaching elementary schoolers and it ended up paying off very well. They actually need that knowledge more than we think. So kind of just spreading it as much as we can and making sure that kids are kept safe, that overdose number, nobody wants children to play a big role in that.

Donna Mazyck: Well, we've had a very informative conversation with Dr. Tami Jakubowski, pediatric nurse practitioner, associate professor at the college of New Jersey and with Ainsley Erdner, who has been an advocate through her journey and growing as an over the counter medicine expert. I really appreciate both of you. What we're hearing is that across the developmental stages, it's important to bring up the conversation and to talk to young people, talk to little children about over the counter medicine safety. And we appreciate what you shared with us today. Thank you for being with us on School Nurse Chat.

Tami Jakubowski: Thank you.

Ainsley Erdner: Thank you.

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