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Too many students, not enough nurses, professionals say

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Many handle more than one school

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By [STEPHANIE KISZCZAK](#)
The Telegraph

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the second of two parts on the dramatically evolving role of school nurses, an occupation affected by education, budgets, legislation and changes in society.*

School nurses are running ragged trying to care for hundreds of students - usually at more than one school.

"That's what you feel like sometimes; you're just spinning your wheels," said Crystal Clark, a nurse at Eastwood Elementary School in East Alton. The school, kindergarten through fifth grade, houses approximately 500 students.

Clark stays busy as children filter through her office each day, some with stomachaches, fevers, cuts, bruises and blisters - and others in need of insulin and other medication. Clark is responsible for the medical care of the school's 500 students.

Most people don't know what school nurses do daily, she said.

"No one just realizes all that we do and that we want to do the best we can," Clark said.

But Clark, and other area school nurses, often feel weighed down by everything they have to do.

"We're not looking for an easy way out," she said. "We just want to be efficient in our work."

School nurses responsible for a large number of children don't have that chance.

Sherri Verdun, a nurse at Trimpe Middle and Bethalto East Elementary schools in Bethalto, is responsible for the care of nearly 1,100 children between the two schools.

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"It's just hard," Verdun said.

She finds it hard to take a personal day and feels guilty calling in sick. When she's not around, the

principal is the only person trained to give students medication.

"It's concerning because we're in a situation where there's not much choice really, there's no one else to do it," she said about the shortage of school nurses.

Gloria Reynolds, a nurse at East Elementary School in Alton, feels lucky to only be responsible for the school's 540 children, in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Reynolds, who worked as a hospital nurse for 15 years and as a school nurse for 11 years, was once the sole school nurse for four schools. She worked one year as a school nurse in Collinsville, where she tended to two large schools and two smaller schools. To have a nurse in every school is "kind of a dream," she said.

"The one most challenging thing in school nursing is the number of children that a school nurse is responsible for - and the importance of having a certified school nurse in every school," Reynolds said.

The National Association of School Nurses recommends one school nurse for every 750 regular education students or one school nurse to every 250 special education students.

But that's not always a possibility.

"There's not a nurse in every school and the parents need to help us work toward that goal," Reynolds said.

Clark agreed. She feels more school nurses would benefit the children and the care that's provided.

"We really want to see the ratio of school nurses to come down because we can provide better care for the kids and education," she said.

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