

I AM A CATHOLIC SCHOOL NURSE



My name is Elizabeth Paquette and I am a Catholic School Nurse. I began to write school nurse but a realization quickly became apparent, I am a Catholic School Nurse. It is my own Catholicity, as well as the school's identity that is reflected in my own nursing practice. It is my faith that influences my every interaction and decision.

While the vast majority of people believe school nursing is Band-Aids and boo-boo's, it remains a day-to-day challenge for those of us engrossed in our nursing practices. No two days are ever alike. We are called upon daily to evaluate and assess children/adolescents using only our assessment skills. In a society based on high-powered technology, school nurses have blood pressure cuffs, stethoscopes, and thermometers to evaluate their young patients. School nurses have perfected the Art of Listening to both the spoken and - more importantly - the unspoken word. Our assessments must include the physical, emotional, and social aspects of every child we meet. School nurses are a resource for faculty and staff and work in tandem with the health education classes.

My family and friends are always quick to tease me about my love affair with, and my devotion to, my school community. They often comment on what a perfect match it is between Malden Catholic and me. The Malden Catholic High School community in Malden, Massachusetts, encompasses approximately 74 faculty and 580 boys in grades 9 to 12, from 40 different communities. Our diversity in our student population is a source of pride for our community. As the first and only school nurse in the history of the school, I have had to develop policies and protocols for a busy health office, be prepared for any and all emergencies, teach CPR & AED training, update and maintain health records and the all-important sports physicals. It is necessary that I understand and be able to communicate to faculty and staff the recent trends in designer drugs and the effectiveness/hazards of newer prescription drugs. I am the resource person for any health issue or the latest adolescent trend. I keep a watchful eye on nutrition, sudden weight gain or loss and seat belt use. I am a confidential and trusted listener of a boy's hopes and dreams, as well as the recent devastating break-up with a girlfriend, a parent's divorce or illness, or their fears about their futures. At the same time it is necessary to ease the pain in a colleague's eyes when they need to know what a diagnosis means for themselves or loved ones. It is the school nurse who must remain calm and compassionate when a member of the school community is given a difficult prognosis. It is a school nurse's ministry to alleviate their fears with the gentle truth and prayer.

I believe it vital that every school nurse attend any gathering in which school nurses are present. It is only by discussion with more knowledgeable counterparts that a school nurse can improve upon and maintain excellence in quality of care. School nursing is,

especially in a Catholic school, a lonely vocation. Workshops and symposiums are necessary lifelines to expanding professional growth and scope.

It is no small wonder why I see my role in the school community as reflective of the mission of Malden Catholic High School. The mission statement includes, in part, “to create a community of faith that promotes the dignity of all through Gospel values...” It is my deepest belief that should be the basis of every school nurse’s practice.

Malden Catholic High School is a Xaverian Brothers Sponsored School and as such, in accord with a basic tenet of the Xaverian Brothers, we are called to “fall in love with the service of God.” I have fallen in love with my school community, and I’ve never been happier. It is my fondest hope for all nurses; that you fall in love with all those whom you serve.

Elizabeth Paquette R.N. NCSN, is the school nurse at Malden Catholic High School in Malden, Massachusetts. Mrs. Paquette was Private and Parochial School Nurse of the Year in 2012 and was the recipient of the Light of the World Award from the Office for the New Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults in the Archdiocese of Boston.

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