

## THE PROFESSIONAL ROLE OF SCHOOL DOCTORS

### 1. Definition

The school doctor is in charge of providing medical care to pupils in accordance with medical science and experience. This care has a holistic approach, i.e. from the physical and the mental perspective, regardless of age or gender and represents the health interests of pupils. The main task of the school doctor's activities lies in preventive medical care. The activities of a school doctor require special medical and psycho-social knowledge, acquired by adequate training professional development.

### 2. Target groups of school doctors' activities

School doctors' activities mainly target pupils. Besides this group, the activities of a school doctor also address school principals, teachers, parents and persons in charge with child care, with whom the cooperation has to be sought for the welfare and benefit of the pupil. School doctors, for the protection of the pupils' health, aim to seek cooperation with the school governing body and all physical and legal persons providing services in school operation in matters which are likely to have direct or indirect effects on the state of health.

### 3. Societal mandate of school doctors

In focusing on the prevention of disorders and on health education of pupils on a healthy lifestyle, school doctors are in charge of a public, health-political mandate. In addition to these measures in the area of preventive medical care, school doctors have an important social role as independent doctor of confidence in acting as a neutral mediator between children, parents and teachers due to the doctor's secrecy, and in caring for the social integration of discriminated groups. Therefore, the recommendations on health-respectively social-political measures are to be taken into consideration as expert opinion.

### 4. Objectives of the school doctor's activities

The school doctor lobbies for the health matters of pupils, as well as for the performance and safety at the pupils' workplace. The school doctor enhances the personal development of pupils from the medical point of view. In creating and consolidating health awareness, the school doctor empowers pupils to be committed to the maintenance and promotion of their own health. In case of need, the school doctor procures (social-) medical assistance to pupils and coordinates them, if needed.

## 5. Tasks of the school doctor

This is the listing of the most important tasks of school doctors:

- 5.1. School medical activities according to the Education Act - Examinations of pupils for the purpose of prevention and detection of disorders and developmental disorders
- 5.2. School medical activities according to the Education Act - Delivering expert opinion and counseling
- 5.3. Continuing care of pupils
- 5.4. Independent doctor of confidence and medical counseling
- 5.5. Backing pupils in crisis periods
- 5.6. Contributing to combating infectious diseases
- 5.7. Cooperation with other medical institutions in the education sector (f.i. school psychologists)
- 5.8. Prevention of work-related hazards, maintenance and promoting the performance at the pupil's workplace
- 5.9. Information about hazardous substances in the area of the school and correct workplace ergonomics
- 5.10. Vaccinations and vaccination counseling at the request of the health authorities
- 5.11. Health education
- 5.12. First aid measures and information
- 5.13. Dental prophylaxis
- 5.14. Notifications to the competent administrative authority in cases of suspected abuse, torture, negligence and sexual abuse in accordance with § 54 Austrian Medical Act 1998, resp. § 37 Youth welfare Act
- 5.15. Social integration of discriminated groups
- 5.16. Cooperation in health-related projects
- 5.17. Documentation and statistics
- 5.18. Hours of duty and hours of consultation as agreed upon in the contract
- 5.19. Annual reports

Apart from the obligation to provide first aid, however, it is not the task of the school doctor to provide medical care in case illness. Being responsible for preventive care, the school doctor has to inform pupils, respectively parents on undesirable tendencies in physical and

mental development, as well as on existing medical symptoms. The family doctor / general practitioner or the specialist doctor is responsible for providing further medical care to children or the youth.

## **6. Secrecy**

The relationship between the pupil and the school doctor is, like any other doctor-patient contact, subject to medical secrecy, in accordance with the Austrian Medical Act 1998. This is not only relevant from the legal point of view, but it is also important with regard to the role of the school doctor as independent doctor of confidence and continuing reference person. Medical secrecy protects the relationship of trust and therefore, has to be safeguarded. School doctors should have a computerized workplace taking into account her/his duties with regard to medical secrecy.

## **7. Training and professional development**

The school doctor has to be aware of the challenges met by pupils in the different school types and has to have adequate professional development for the respective school type. Therefore, attempts are made to introduce the obligation that all school doctors acquire the diploma of a school doctor, issued by the Austrian Medical Chamber, and that school doctors practicing in special school types, also have adequate special training (f.i. sports medicine). Continuing professional development specifically targeting school doctors is indispensable, in order to be able to adapt the methodic and practical state of knowledge to the respective societal and school relevant problems, and to promote the collegial dialogue among school doctors. In addition, practical psycho-social experience is advantageous.

## **8. Working conditions**

The working conditions of school doctors have to be adapted to the methodic needs and the specific requirements of the respective school type, the following frame conditions being the prerequisites:

- The office of the school doctor (size, lighting, aeration and situation) has to provide the possibility to perform examinations and to have conversations in a discrete atmosphere
- Examination devices
- Medication stock for emergency medical care
- Adequate computer supply / assistance

- The working conditions of school doctors have to allow them to practice in compliance with medical, scientific, pedagogic, legal and ethical standards

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**Appendix**

## *Appendix*

Responsibilities of school doctors cover the following activities:

### **5.1. The role of the school doctor according to the Education Act: Providing examinations and information**

- 5.1.1. School medical activities in accordance with the Education Act – **examinations** (prior to classes);
- 5.1.2. Examining all pupils in the course of the school year. Documentation of the examination results in the health file of the pupil;
- 5.1.3. Examining all pupils whose state of health requires supervision at shorter intervals at the beginning of the school year and repeatedly, at least twice a year. If the condition of such pupils requires any facilitation during class due to disability, a request has to be submitted to the school principal;
- 5.1.4. Examining pupils who are likely to be prevented from physical education for more than one week due to convalescence or injury. In cases of doubt, the school doctor may request the pupil's parents (legal guardian) on behalf of the school principal to provide a report on diagnostic findings by the attending doctor;
- 5.1.5. Examining pupils as to their fitness for participating at school events, excluding field days, excursions as well as school events set out in § 2, VII Federal Law Gazette nr. 369/1974;
- 5.1.6. Examining pupils upon request by the school principal; examining pupils in accordance with the Narcotic Substances Act, if they are suspected of misusing substances;
- 5.1.7. Examining pupils as to their aptitude in schools with sports focus and educational establishments for nursery education;
- 5.1.8. Inform parents (legal guardian) in case of pupils presenting a health risk;

## **5.2. The role of the school doctor according to the Education Act: Delivering expert opinion and counseling**

### **5.2.1. Appraising school maturity**

In case of need, the school doctor has to appraise the school maturity of a child, the following areas being the most frequent ones:

- 5.2.1.1. Opinion about premature school enrolment (§ 7 par. 4 Compulsory schooling Act)
- 5.2.1.2. Opinion about health and physical fitness required for a certain kind of school (§ 3 par. 1 c Education Act)
- 5.2.1.3. Opinion on exemption of pupils from compulsory classes for health reasons (§ 11 par. 6 Education Act, § 52 Administrative Procedure Act)
- 5.2.1.4. Opinion on risk of physical strain caused by class skipping (§ 26 par. 1 Education Act);

### **5.2.2. Appraising performance deficits**

The school doctor delivers an opinion on whether performance deficits are caused by health problems (§ 27 par. 2 Education Act, § 52 Administrative Procedure Act);

If there is the suspicion that performance deficits are due to health problems, the teacher has to contact the school doctor. The school doctor has to examine the pupil in this regard at the yearly examination or in a personal conversation, and has to refer the pupil to the competent colleague, in case the suspicion was confirmed.

### **5.2.3. Counselling**

- 5.2.3.1. Counselling teachers regarding the reviewing and appraising of the pupils' performance presenting physical or health risks (§ 2 par. 4, §11 par. 8 of the provision on performance appraisal, Federal Law Gazette nr. 371/1974).
- 5.2.3.2. counselling teachers for their discussing school health issues with the legal guardian in accordance with § 66 par. 1 Education Act (§ 62 Education Act); f.i. diabetes, asthma, partial performance deficiencies,

epilepsy, dyslexia, eating disorders, social disorders (violent tendency, aggression) with the aim of offering pupils practice-related education in accordance with the curriculum and providing health education. This implies the teaching activities of the school doctor.

5.2.3.3. Counselling the school community committee in dealing with questions of health care in accordance with § 66 par. 1 Education Act (§ 64 par.7 a/hh).

5.2.3.4. Permanent consultation with all teachers, in particular the head teacher and with the physical education teachers.

### **5.3. Continuing care of pupils**

The school doctor provides care to pupils from their enrollment until they leave school regarding their physical and mental development. The continuity of care is guaranteed by the pupils' yearly examinations, giving the school doctor the role of a continuing reference person.

### **5.4. Independent doctor of confidence and medical counseling**

In principle, each pupil has the possibility to have a confidential conversation with the school doctor on medical issues, which goes beyond the yearly examination.

### **5.5. Backing pupils in crisis periods**

Pupils in need of more intense medical attention may see the school doctor more often than only once at the yearly examination (as f.i. after an examination in accordance with § 13 of the Narcotic Substances Act).

### **5.6. Contributing to combating infectious diseases**

School doctors are responsible for preventive measures for promoting and maintaining the health of Pupils, as well as for monitoring the teachers' health, if demanded by the competent school authority.

### **5.8. Prevention of work-related hazards, maintenance and promoting the performance at the pupil's workplace**

School doctors are responsible for preventive measures in workshops, sports facilities, school kitchens, laboratories and similar facilities, in order to prevent health hazards, and they are also responsible for correct workplace ergonomics.

### **5.9. Information about hazardous substances in the area of the school**

Providing counseling and information about the prevention of accidents due to toxic substances.

### **5.10. Vaccinations and vaccination counseling**

The school doctor has to control the vaccination status of the pupils and to provide vaccination counseling. In case of need, the school doctor may be charged with performing vaccination on pupils.

### **5.11. Health education**

The school doctors provides counseling in the area of nutrition, exercise, health lifestyle and provides support for addiction prevention in general (such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, computer and game addiction, etc.).

### **5.12. First aid and information**

In cases of accidents and in a life-threatening situation, the school doctor provides first aid immediately.

The school doctor is in charge of first-aid facilities available to the pupils and gives instructions about first-aid measures.

### **5.13. Dental prophylaxis**

The school doctor assesses the dental status of the pupils and provides information and counseling to pupils and parents on caries prophylaxis and dental and maxillary malpositions.

#### **5.14. Notifications in accordance with § 54 Austrian Medical Act 1998, resp. § 37 Youth welfare Act**

Notifications to the competent administrative authority in cases of suspected abuse, torture, negligence and sexual abuse.

#### **5.15. Social integration of discriminated groups**

The school doctor has to offer his counseling and support to teachers integrating handicapped children.

#### **5.16. Cooperation in health-related projects**

The school doctor may be tasked with organizing, assisting and/or supporting school projects (f.i. health days) if her/his competence and skills may be of use.

#### **5.17. Documentation and statistics**

The school doctor has to keep records on the examinations and counseling performed.

#### **5.18. Annual report**

The school doctor has to submit an annual report.