

Medication errors frequent in schools

Nearly half of U.S. school nurses surveyed for a recent University of Iowa (UI) study reported medication errors in their schools in the past year. In addition, three quarters of the nurses reported that unlicensed personnel such as school secretaries, health aides and teachers dispense medications to students in their school systems.

The findings are contained in a study led by Ann Marie McCarthy, Ph.D., associate professor of nursing at the UI, and published in the November issue of the *Journal of School Health*. The survey, which was completed by 649 school nurses throughout the United States, looked at medication administration in schools, including policies and guidelines governing the dispensing of drugs to students, the types of medication commonly administered, and which school personnel were authorized to dispense medications.

According to the study, school nurses estimated an average of 5.6% of students in grades kindergarten through 12 receive medications on a typical school day, with the majority -- 3.3% -- receiving medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Other common medications include over-the-counter medications, analgesics, asthma and anti-seizure medications.

Errors included giving an overdose or double dose (22.9%), giving medicines without authorization (20.6%), giving the wrong medicine (20%) or unspecified mistakes (29.8%).

"When you put it all together -- more children, more health problems and more medications -- there are more opportunities for errors to occur," McCarthy said.

SOURCE: *Journal of School Health*, November 2000