

Health issues require more LTUSD nurses



The need for school nurses is growing in LTUSD. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Twenty-four students with seizures, nine with Type 1 diabetes, two with Type 2, 112 with asthma, 21 with cardiac conditions, 136 with food allergies and of those 45 require epi-pens. Those are some of the issues nurses in Lake Tahoe Unified School District are dealing with on a daily basis.

They handle feeding tubes, catheterization, suctioning, oxygen, AED, nebulizer, diastat (rectal valium), and blood glucose-insulin.

On a recent school day in a matter of an hour a nurse was dealing with a growth on a student's leg that a teacher had noticed (turned out to be benign) and a teacher having a heart attack (that person is fine, had a stent put in).

Just putting a Band-Aid on a scrape would likely be a welcome distraction from the more serious medical conditions.

Margaret McKean, head nurse with the district, on Tuesday told the school board how her staff is seeing an increase in chronic illnesses, as well as social and emotional conditions.

It's impacting what is going on in the classroom.

"It's harder for the teachers to do their jobs," McKean said. That is why the nurses are brought into the fold to help with overall needs assessments for students.

The nursing staff has slowly been increasing to handle the rise in health issues.

The board on May 10 agreed to hire the equivalent of 1.24 full time nurses. This will bring the staff to five. Working with McKean now are Karen Tucker, Jen Drennan and Morgan Kiskinen. They are dispersed throughout the district, though not every school has a nurse on site each day.

To be a school nurse requires having a bachelor's of science in nursing, being a registered nurse and having a school health credential.

Not every child has access to health care outside of what is provided by the school district.

"We are the front line," McKean told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Parents say go see the school nurse."

This is her 34th year in the district, with next year possibly being her last. McKean is at the high school where she says the stress level is higher, but it pays off just being able to help students.

As for why there has been an increase in health issues, McKean said, "It used to be the fetus was the only pure environment. Now there are so many chemicals that it is affecting the auto-immune system."

Better diagnosis also ups the numbers.

There are also the routine issues the nurses have to deal with, like checking on immunizations. Seventh grade is a critical year to ensure everyone is up-to-date. Only 38 percent of the sixth-graders are immunized, so the nurses have a lot of work to do before now and the start of next school year in August.

Nurses also administer hearing and vision screenings. This year 1,353 students had hearing tests, with 15 students not passing. Of the 1,450 eye tests, 335 kids were referred for follow-up checks.

—

In other board action:

- South Tahoe High School students Annika Johnson and Sydney Morris were recognized for their winning photographs in the California Streaming Photo contest.

- The board authorized hiring personnel to handle the growing two-way immersion program throughout the district. It will be expanding to STHS in the fall.