California School Nurses Organization

Position Statement

INSULIN ADMINISTRATION AT SCHOOL

STATEMENT

The California School Nurses Organization strongly supports the need for the administration of insulin at school for students with diabetes. Only a credentialed school nurse, registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse, parent/guardian, or a trained parent designee (not employed by the school district) and/or student may legally administer insulin in the school setting. Students may self-administer insulin after demonstrating willingness, understanding and competency to perform the procedure to the credentialed school nurses. Such independence is the ultimate goal and a part of all nursing patient goals. An Individualized School Health Plan (ISHP) needs to be developed by a credentialed school nurses for each student who requires insulin and other diabetes care during the school day. This plan includes information from the physician, school nurse, teacher school administrator or school personnel who has direct educational interest with students, parent/guardian and student. The plan describes training provided and staff designated to perform various functions in the care of the student with diabetes in that school setting. In addition, some, but not all, students diagnosed with diabetes may also require accommodations through either a 504 Plan or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

California state law requires (Education Code 49423 and 49423.1):

- An authorized California-licensed health care provider to authorize in writing the student’s requirement for insulin at school and whether she/he can prepare and self-administer the insulin injection.

- The parent/guardian will complete and sign a written request for insulin administration at school and/or consent for self-administration, as prescribed in the written statement of the authorized health care provider. This shall include consent for the school nurse to communicate with the health care provider regarding the provider’s written statement of insulin administration if there are any concerns or questions about the order.

The following guidelines are recommended by the California department of Education in the Program Advisory on Medication Administration (CDE, 2005) and strongly support CSNO:

- The written statement from the health care provider must include:
  1. The type and brand or generic name of insulin
  2. Reason and circumstances of administration
  3. Determination of dose, including any specific sliding scale based on the glucose testing, urine ketone testing, and/or carbohydrate consumption
  4. Method and times insulin is to be administered

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Any changes in insulin type, dose, time or method or administration necessitates a new written physician’s order. Additionally, the California Nursing Practice Act prohibits the credentialed school nurse from accepting orders from or acting upon parent or guardian generated changes or modifications to the insulin administration directions in the health care provider’s statement unless such changes are received in writing from the health care provider. The health care provider also cannot direct the credentialed school nurse to allow the student’s parent to change the insulin dose to be given by the nurse.

When self-administering, the student will demonstrate to the credentialed school nurse knowledge of the procedure as well as the proper technique of insulin injection, appropriate dose administration, utilization of universal precaution, care of the equipment and disposal of supplies, and accurate documentation of dose and time of insulin administration.

RATIONALE

Current diabetes management requires rigid control of blood sugar levels throughout the day. Students with diabetes may need to receive insulin at school to achieve control of their blood sugar levels. The determination of insulin dose during the school day is a complex process involving calculations based on blood sugar levels, activity level, and carbohydrate consumption based upon doctor’s orders that often involve complex algorithms and/or sliding scales. Careful diabetes management during the school day will help endure an optimal and successful educational experience and stable health in the least restrictive environment.

The California Nursing Practice Act defines the scope of nursing practice, a standard of legal practice put into place to protect the public and provide recipients of health care with a standard of care while under nursing care. This includes students in our schools diagnosed with diabetes who require to receive insulin at school. The credentialed school nurse has the legal authority and responsibility, the scientific knowledge and the nursing assessment skills required to perform the complex steps involved in safely determining and administering the correct insulin dose to the school-aged students under their care. This procedure may only legally and safely be delegated by the credentialed school nurse to another licensed nurse, such as Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), not to unlicensed school personnel. Registered nurses can be disciplined by the Board of registered nurses and face loss of their license and malpractice liability for training and allowing unlicensed staff to perform unauthorized nursing procedures, including the administration of insulin.

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The California Education Code also governs the provision of health and medical care in schools to ensure the protection of the health and safety of children while they are in the school and attending school-related activities. Roles and functions of various school staff in relation to the health and medical care of students are delineated. This code has no provision allowing unlicensed school staff to administer any medication by injection other than the two emergency medications, glucagon and epinephrine by auto injector device. The administration of insulin is NOT an emergency, but rather helps stabilize the student’s blood sugar levels during the school day in order to better overall control and prevention of future disabilities related to chronically high blood sugar levels. In most cases, NOT giving a single dose of insulin does not create an urgent health problem or cause any life threatening symptoms, but if too much insulin is given, this can result in life threatening hypoglycemia or low blood sugar, coma and even death if not appropriately assessed and treated.

The California School Nurses Organization supports only the following individuals to administer insulin by injection, pump device, or any other methods in the school setting:

1. Credentialed, registered school nurses
2. Licensed vocation nurse employee or contract employee
3. Student, if determined by doctor and school nurse to be competent
4. Parent, guardian, or designee who is NOT a district employee

Under the Nursing Practice Act, it is also the registered nurse, not the physician or parent, who determines the appropriate and safe level of nursing care to be provided to patients (students) under their care and responsibility. They also must train, determine competence, monitor, and supervise the person to whom any nursing care is delegated or assigned. It is illegal for a registered nurse to delegate or assign a procedure to someone else who is not legally authorized to perform that procedure. Only during a disaster emergency, as defined in the Nursing Practice Act, would it be appropriate for other unlicensed staff to be trained to administer insulin and other non-emergency injectable medications. CSNO does NOT support the routine training of unlicensed staff to give insulin in the school setting just because a licensed nurse in not available, as being advised in the recent CDE Diabetes Settlement statement and subsequent Legal Advisory (CDE, 2007), because it is NOT SAFE for students, there is no clear legal authority for this practice in the Education Code, and it is not legally permitted under the Nursing Practice Act. School districts, whether rural, suburban or urban, are obligated to provide necessary and safe health and nursing services for all students and need to make provisions to hire or contract for licensed nurses to administer insulin to school students during the school day or during attendance at school-sponsored or school-related educational activities.

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References: (Continued)

Appellate Court Decision Number 07AS04631A, (2010) Retrieved October 12, 2010 from California Law website: 
http://appellatecases.courttinfo.ca.gov/search/case/mainCaseScreen.cfm?dist=3&doc_id=1387513&doc_no=C061150


LVN Nursing Practice Act is Business and Professions Code, Chapter 6.5 sections 2859-2895.5. Retrieved October 12, 2010 from the California Law website: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/calawquery?codesection=bpc&codebody=&hits=20

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