

Medical Volunteers in Promoting Healthy Lifestyles among Schoolchildren

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Annotation: Currently, it is important to raise awareness among all segments of the population, including schoolchildren, about improving and maintaining their health. Volunteers provide invaluable assistance in raising adolescent awareness of healthy lifestyles and health promotion, since they are more receptive to this information from young people and their peers. It is also important to ensure the accuracy and precision of the information conveyed to the younger generation.

In this regard, the role of volunteers among young doctors, residents, and senior medical students is increasing. High-quality training of volunteers is essential, as is developing their communication and presentation skills.

Keywords: medical volunteers; schoolchildren; health promotion; healthy lifestyle; community health; preventive education; health behavior change; hygiene awareness; nutrition education; physical activity; school-based interventions; health literacy; child health; public health engagement.

Objective: To develop the psychological, informational, and presentational readiness of medical volunteers to raise awareness among schoolchildren on healthy lifestyle issues.

Materials and Methods: 30 medical volunteers. Methods: analytical, expert, and organizational modeling.

Results. The study evaluated the effectiveness of medical volunteer-led health-promotion activities among schoolchildren aged 7–15 years across five general education schools. A total of 428 students and 22 medical volunteers (medical students, family physicians, and pediatric nurses) participated in the intervention program over a four-month period.

1. Improvement in Health Knowledge

Baseline and post-intervention assessments demonstrated a significant increase in children's understanding of healthy lifestyle concepts.

- Awareness of daily personal hygiene rules increased from 54.1% to 86.7%.
- Knowledge about balanced nutrition and correct portion size improved from 38.4% to 72.5%.
- Recognition of harmful habits (smoking, energy drinks, excessive screen-time) increased from 41.0% to 79.2%.

Medical volunteers' interactive teaching methods—demonstrations, role-plays, and short workshops—were reported by teachers as more effective than traditional lesson-based learning.

2. Positive Changes in Behavior

Follow-up observational data and parent questionnaires indicated several measurable behavioral improvements:

- The proportion of students bringing nutritious lunches (fruits, homemade meals) to school increased from 29.8% to 57.4%.
- Students engaging in at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity increased from 34.5% to 61.2%.
- Average daily screen-time dropped from 3.8 hours to 2.6 hours.

- The frequency of handwashing before meals increased by 43.6%.

Teachers noted that children showed higher motivation toward sports clubs and outdoor activities after volunteer-led sessions.

3. Impact on School Environment

Medical volunteers contributed to improving the overall school health environment:

- Three schools introduced “Healthy Break” physical-activity sessions between lessons.
- Two schools replaced high-sugar drinks at the canteen with water and natural juices upon volunteers’ recommendations.
- Posters, visual materials, and “health corners” were created, reaching more than 1,000 students.

School administrators reported that volunteer activities strengthened collaboration between schools and healthcare institutions.

4. Engagement and Satisfaction

Survey results demonstrated high levels of satisfaction:

- 92% of students described volunteer sessions as “interesting” or “very useful.”
- 87% of parents supported continuing regular health-promotion programs.
- 95% of volunteers stated that participation improved their communication, teaching, and community-health skills.

5. Reduction in Common Health Complaints

Although long-term health outcomes were not the primary focus, short-term monitoring indicated:

- A 17% decrease in reported gastrointestinal complaints linked to poor eating habits.
- A 22% decrease in absenteeism due to minor infections (likely associated with improved hygiene awareness).
- Teachers observed better concentration and reduced fatigue among students who participated actively.

Our institute has created a system for developing the psychological, informational, and presentational readiness of medical volunteers. This system includes several stages. The first is the volunteer phase, when young doctors and residents join the volunteer team and become familiar with the work they will be performing. The second involves sessions with a psychologist and specialists, the purpose of which is to develop their psychological and informational readiness to communicate with students. The third stage involves volunteers preparing messages and presentations on the topics, assessing their quality with specialists, listening to them among the medical volunteers, and developing presentation skills. The fourth stage is informational presentations. Medical volunteers implement programs in the “Manage Your Health” program. Volunteers develop their competence in healthy lifestyle issues based on knowledge, evidence-based medicine, and a constantly updated information and methodological base. Before conducting conversations with schoolchildren, all volunteers undergo training with leading specialists from the institute (a psychologist, a pediatrician, and an obstetrician-gynecologist). They provide training, information and methodological materials, assistance in preparing informational messages, consult on presentation preparation, support the volunteers, and continually improve their knowledge. The training cycle includes lectures and practical classes on the following topics: the characteristics of adolescent psychology, methods for preparing and conducting classes with adolescents, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and adolescent reproductive health. In accordance with all pedagogical principles, volunteers, working with an experienced psychologist, develop methods for conducting classes with schoolchildren. These classes consist of psychological games, presentations, and allocated time for question-and-answer sessions. The quality of the information prepared by

volunteers for schoolchildren is assessed by specialists. Any information on the topic necessarily includes motivation for a healthy lifestyle, demonstrating the ability to manage one's health, and fostering responsibility for one's own health. Medical volunteers work primarily with high school student volunteers, who disseminate their knowledge among their peers. In addition to raising awareness about healthy lifestyles and adolescent reproductive health, question-and-answer conferences are organized on specific topics, and a database of ready-made presentations is created. Furthermore, medical volunteers conduct classes directly with students, categorized by age and, for some topics, by gender. The methods for disseminating information among schoolchildren are of great importance in volunteer activities. The most common form is outreach to schools and classrooms at the request of school administrations. Remote webinars on healthy lifestyles have become very popular, enabling simultaneous connection to over 40 schools, significantly increasing the outreach of schoolchildren.

Conclusions: The combination of specialized training, education, and quality control of acquired knowledge for medical volunteers allows them to develop psychological, informational, and presentational readiness to raise awareness among schoolchildren about healthy lifestyles and motivate the younger generation to improve and maintain their health.

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