

# Is It Time to Explore Day Camp Nursing?

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**Abstract:** *The role of the nurse at day and residential camps can vary considerably and is influenced by many factors including location, size, and nature of the program offered. Gaining insight into day camp nursing and actively asking questions about performance expectations can lead to an informed decision about a new work setting. Potential resources for the day camp nurse are identified.*

Nurses at residential or overnight camps frequently return to the same camp season after season. Initially, resident camp nursing may appeal to a nurse because of a desire for travel, a fun and challenging experience, or to relive a childhood camp experience. Working during the summer camp season may fit well for those on an academic calendar or those who have to plan around children's summer vacations. The camp community is attractive to many nurses as is the opportunity to work with children and young adults, be in an outdoor setting, develop new skills, and make a difference in the lives of others.

Although many picture the camp nurse in a residential camp setting, day camp offers an alternative camp adventure. Day camps are time-honored programs run by a wide variety of organizations such as Girl Scouts or 4H, churches or synagogues, community parks and recreation departments or even colleges. More recently there is an emergence of day camps run by commercial businesses such as health and fitness clubs or dance studios and also by health centers. Whether privately or publically sponsored, many aspects of program and operation are similar to those at residential camps.

Many day camps operate for just one or two weeks each summer and others for the whole season. Nurses attracted from residential to day camp settings find the transition less disruptive to their families and to themselves noting such benefits as: sleeping in their own beds at night and eating with the family, having downtime in their own homes for recharging at the end of the day, and enjoying working with kids in a fun environment. For nurses whose children are attending camp, there is the convenience of being on the same schedule and in the same location— incentives to return to camp for successive seasons.

Most residential camps have a dedicated Health Center with a professional nursing staff. Staffing will depend on numbers of campers, positions for supplemental unlicensed personnel, state requirements and funding. Day camps may or may not have dedicated space for providing health and first aid services and a professional nurse on duty during hours of operation to provide those services. The decision whether to have a nurse may be influenced by state requirements, camper population (for example, diabetics, asthmatics, etc.), and the scope of program activities.

## Special Needs Day Camps

Many day camps accept campers with special needs in their camps with a smaller number dedicated to this population. With inclusion of special needs campers into mainstream camps, a nurse may visit the camper in their home prior to camp attendance to make the transition smoother for the family and the camper. The nurse becomes familiar with the camper to assure that the camper's needs can be accommodated and to help ensure the proper resources are on hand. This is a pro-active approach to planning for a variety of special needs campers.

## Day One Nurse

Some day camps hire a nurse to be present for intake registration on the first day of camp and then to be on-call for the duration of camp, a position often called a "Day One Nurse." After participating in registration day functions, the nurse is not on-site but is available by phone consult when camp is in session. The nursing duties might include organizing health forms, summarizing health issues for the staff, and planning clearly for the precise delegation of responsibilities to the trained health personnel on site (first aid or wilderness emergency certifications). Communicating clear expectations that are carefully constructed is essential to practice safe delegation.

## Considering a Setting Change

Nurses who have residential camp experience have important skills to take to the day camp setting. Readily transferrable skills include assessment skills, treatment of common camp injuries and conditions, use of household products for first aid treatment, and knowledge about practicing safely within one's scope of practice. When residential

and day camp nurses get together and compare their roles, they are quick to point out that day camp allows you to stay local and be home at the end of a day whereas residential camp has a sense of community and connecting with growing campers outside their usual environment. Depending on the needs of one's family, a nurse may change from one type of camp setting to another.

Camps offer exposure to the fun elements of being around children of all ages with all sorts of challenges and dilemmas. On-call hours, longer days, and dealing with camper homesickness are part of residential camp communities. Day camp nurses typically see the same type of injuries and illnesses, but hand off campers to the parents/guardians at the day's end. They also hope parents use judgment in keeping day campers at home when they are showing signs of illness.

While recognizing that a seasoned residential camp nurse has valued experience to take to the day camp setting, it is equally possible that a day camp nurse might like to take that experience further through role immersion at a residential camp. What concerns arise about the differences and similarities in these settings? What does a nurse need to know and what are the fundamental questions to ask in weighing these options? The information that follows addresses these common questions.

## **Addressing Common Questions**

### **1. What are the focus issues for day and residential camps?**

Issues for both types of camps are parallel and include: information flow and record keeping, communication, and health and safety of the campers and staff.

- Information flow starts with the camp application process and includes receiving and maintaining health and medical information, medication orders, contact information, and monitoring access to this information when camp is in session.
- Information flow also includes maintaining records. A medical log is a legal record and thus needs to be written in a bound book with numbered pages, in ink on lined paper without skipping lines, includes a disposition of campers and should be retained for a prescribed number of years. Certain illnesses and injuries are reportable to the state and need explicit documentation in a timely manner. Requirements for record maintenance on employees and campers are prescribed by licensing and accreditation bodies.
- Effective communication with parents, staff, camp director, and health facilities outside the camp premises is essential to proactively deal with potential problems. Having working relationships and a communication network in place before there is an issue will make processing "dilemmas" easier for all parties.
- Safety begins with prevention and an awareness of potential or current issues seen. The nurse needs to monitor safety in the camp setting and activities on behalf of campers and staff and take appropriate action to stop an unsafe situation or modify an activity.

A nurse at a residential camp is on hand 24/7 while the availability of the nurse varies in a day camp setting. Regardless of one's availability, the nurse needs to maximize and pre-plan information flow, communication and safety with the camp director prior to the arrival of campers.

### **2. What state regulations apply to camps?**

The regulation of camps varies tremendously state to state as does the terminology used to describe the process. States may regulate camps through licensure or certification while others provide operational guidelines. Regardless of the specifics and the approach, the intent is safety. This article uses examples that are

#### **Table 1. Priorities for the "Day One" Nurse at Camp**

- Stress safety with activities.
- Delegate appropriately as to who will assume the medication administration responsibility.
- Determine who is currently certified in first aid and CPR. Again, for delegation purposes, the nurse would have a conversation with unlicensed personnel about their roles in both routine care situations and in an emergency.
- Check out the first aid box and make sure needed items are included and current.

- Ensure that Epi-pens and asthma inhalers are available when needed to the campers who have them ordered. Many camps stock an Epi-pen as part of their emergency response supplies.

### **3. What questions should a nurse ask the camp director about the nurse role prior to camp starting?**

Talking with the camp director is advisable before accepting a position to get a sense of the camp's philosophy and to clarify the expectations for the nursing role. This conversation sets the tone for the nurse/director relationship. Table 2 summarizes the questions the nurse will want to ask during this conversation or through other avenues before the season starts.

### **4. What are sources of information for a nurse contemplating a day or residential camp job?**

- The Association of Camp Nurses (<http://www.acn.org/jobs/tips.html>)
- State specific youth regulations often found within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).
- A way to talk to other nurses who have been to camp is to dialogue in a blog. A sample can be found at <http://allnurses.com/camp-nursing>. You can find interesting information about camp nursing at this site and plenty of encouragement.

### **Learn from Day Camp Nurses**

A good way to learn more about working as a nurse at day camp is to talk to colleagues who have been there. Our experiences have been very positive.

*"Day camp nursing blends my home and work life and I can sleep in my own bed at night. In addition, the day camp is held at the college where I work therefore I can maintain my regular job while also being one of the camp RNs." (Betty Webster)*

*"The appeal of day camp is drive time (travel costs are minimized), and the nurse can unwind in their own home just like at the end of my usual day at work. Personal comfort boundaries are not sacrificed with day camp nursing." (Liz Austin)*

Take your pick of day or residential camp nursing. No matter where you work, camp nursing offers the nurse many challenges and multiple rewards.

### **References**

<http://www.acn.org/jobs/tips.html> (Tips for a nurse to consider before accepting camp job)

[www.dhmh.state.md.us](http://www.dhmh.state.md.us)

Interview with Linda Rudie, Section Head in the Center for Consumer Health Services, Office of Food Protection, Infectious Disease and Environmental Health Administration, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 02/04/11.