Childcare Health Consultants

In 1987, the Federal Bureau of Maternal and Child Health approved funding for a collaborative project by the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to develop national health and safety standards for out-of-home childcare. The result of that project was the landmark 1992 publication *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs* (See Resources). One of the recommendations in Caring for Our Children is that "Each center and organized small family childcare home system shall utilize the services of a health consultant. Large and small family home caregivers shall avail themselves of community resources established for health consultation to childcare."

Childcare providers seeking to implement this recommendation may ask "What is a health consultant and how can he or she help me?" and "Where do I find a health consultant?" This article is intended to help answer these and other questions using information in Caring for Our Children and the experiences of the National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants (NTI).

**Role of Consultants**

Most childcare providers are not trained health professionals, yet they frequently deal with child health issues involving physical and mental health in areas like nutrition, physical safety, oral health and hygiene, and developmental disabilities. To provide the best quality care for every child, caregivers should have access to reliable consultation on available resources in a variety of fields. This is the role of the childcare health consultant.

Caring for Our Children defines a childcare health consultant as "a health professional who has an interest in and experience with children, has knowledge of resources and regulations, and is comfortable linking health resources with facilities." The term "health professional" is very broad and can include physicians, certified pediatric or family nurse practitioners, and registered nurses with pediatric or out-of-home childcare experience. A childcare health consultant also may be a health educator, pharmacist, environmental health specialist, medical social worker, oral health specialist, licensed dietitian, or other child health professional. One important criterion is that the consultants be knowledgeable not only about child health, but also about out-of-home childcare in general, state childcare licensing requirements, and availability of health resources in the community.

**State and Local Guidelines**

It is the responsibility of the state or local health and childcare agencies to establish the duties expected of the consultant and then to recruit health professionals qualified to perform these duties. By creating a childcare health consultant job description, the state or local agency defines the role of the consultant. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care or the National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants can provide information and assistance in developing the job description.

**Benefits**

So, how can a childcare health consultant benefit your childcare program? The role of the consultant is to help providers improve the health, safety, and overall quality of childcare programs through consultation, staff training, and resource referral. Topics the consultant might address include health assessments, immunizations,
nutrition, safety and injury prevention, identifying and caring for children with special needs, sanitation and communicable disease prevention, and health promotion for staff, parents, and children. In addition, the consultant may provide assistance on meeting specific objectives like preparation for licensing or accreditation, or development of policies and procedures.

The childcare health consultant also serves as a "bridge" to a variety of specialized services in the community and state. For example, if a childcare program has an unsafe playground, the consultant may provide basic playground safety information or staff training either directly, or by linking the provider to a certified playground safety inspector.

**Training**

It is expected that a childcare health consultant will be trained and recognized by state or local agencies; however, there are no Federal laws or regulations regarding who can call themselves a consultant. To locate a qualified consultant call your state or local health department, childcare resource and referral agency, childcare management agency, or childcare licensing division. Some of the questions that should be asked include:

- What is your background and training in child health? (MD, RN, etc.)
- By what agency are you employed?
- What training have you had in childcare health and safety?
- Do you receive regular continuing education in your role as a childcare health consultant?
- What is your fee? Who pays it? What documentation must the childcare provider file for reimbursement?

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The National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants (NTICCHC) is a cooperative undertaking of the Department of Maternal and Child Health and the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, both of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, with funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the Institute is to support the health and safety of young children in childcare settings through the development of a national childcare health consultant training program. As of August 2001, NTI had completed 28 training sessions with 202 graduates in 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These graduates then provide training to health consultants in their states. For more information, contact the NTI, 919-966-3780.

**Resources**

For more information, please refer to the following resources:

- American Academy of Pediatrics; 800-433-9016; [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- Healthy Child Care America Campaign [www.healthychildcare.org](http://www.healthychildcare.org)
- National Child Care Information Center; 800-616-2242; [www.nccic.org](http://www.nccic.org)
- National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care; 800-598-KIDS; [nrc.uchsc.edu](http://nrc.uchsc.edu)
- National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants; [www.sph.unc.edu/courses/childcare](http://www.sph.unc.edu/courses/childcare)