

Notes from the Senior Class Meeting April 5, 2010

Susan Ridker opened the meeting. She reminded parents that the PTO is still fundraising. The PTO is currently running a spring raffle for 2 pairs of tickets to the Red Sox- Rangers game on April 20th in field box 76. Two winners will be drawn, one for each pair of tickets. Raffle tickets are \$25 each or 3 tickets for \$50. Full details can be found at the BHS PTO website <http://www.bhs-pto.org/raffle.html> and the raffle form can be found at: <http://www.bhs-pto.org/pdf/2010%20Spring%20Raffle%20Mail%20in%20Form.pdf> The winners will be drawn on April 16th.

Dean Lande gave an update. The seniors are at the end of their year and there are many things going on. The prom is coming up and the school is arranging transportation to the prom using luxury coach buses. Students will have the choice between using the bus or arranging a limo on their own. Students may not come to the prom in party buses and will not be admitted to the prom if they are on a party bus. Parents will be receiving a letter from the PTO, BCASA, BPEN, and the After the Prom Party encouraging the use of the school arranged luxury coach buses.

Dean Lande continued saying that this is a big time of the year for students. The students are hearing from colleges. It is also a very stressful time of the year. The senior paper is coming due; the students are doing school visits and will have to decide on colleges. Most don't care very much anymore about school. Parents will be receiving a 4-5 page letter about the end of the year, by next Monday (April 12th). Dean Lande stated that she would just review some important information (at the meeting). She stated that this is the second to last senior parent PTO meeting. The last meeting will be a coffee, parent to parent meeting and time to say goodbye. She thanked the Susan's for their work for the class of 2010. Dean Lande assured parents that the kids will make it to the end and will continue their journey.

The senior paper is the biggest deal for the students. If parents have not received a letter from the Deans, they can breathe a sigh of relief. Your kid is not at risk, yet. Report cards will come out around vacation. The marking period ends on Monday (April 12th). If parents do not receive their child's report card, call the dean's office.

Dean Lande said that the end of the senior year is a wonderful celebratory time. We want the kids to do the right thing to the end. She said we've been telling the kids that there is no senior prank this year. The students can't violate the rules during senior week or they will not walk at graduation. Parents may know that this class feels put upon. They didn't win the Powder Puff football game, they have no senior prank, and they didn't quite make the MCAS ice cream party (they were close).

The question of whether school arranged buses should be mandatory has been asked. The buses are not yet mandatory. They have made the buses more enticing without mandating their use. We encourage parents to do the right thing with their kids and the prom. The administration has differentiated between party buses and limos. Encourage your kid to use the bus, it is more green, less expense and it is less tempting to do the

wrong thing. The school may be moving towards mandatory buses, but at the moment we want to give the kids a certain amount of freedom of choice. But certainly we don't want any students not participating in graduation.

There is one more celebratory thing for seniors. Students are being recruited for the 3rd annual Tell Your Story Assembly. Students read their story about who they are showing that they are not just a jock etc. It is a better world when we understand each other better. Kids read their senior essay or another. It is amazing to recognize them and their stories. We are looking to break down barriers by sharing these stories.

Susan Ridker introduced our guest speaker, Dr. Kay Petersen, director of Simmons College and Emmanuel College Health Services. Susan noted that Dr. Petersen had received rave reviews at previous senior class PTO meetings. Susan also noted that Dr. Petersen is the director of the College Health Program at the Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital. Dr. Petersen is also a parent of a college junior and a high school senior.

Dr. Petersen opened by saying that there is so much to talk about health in college. Dr. Petersen said she would speak about the transition to managing greater health sufficiency in college, and how to deal with problems that arise. She stated that not all students are the same and parents can't know if her talk would be relevant in advance. Parents may never know if the talk had relevance or what happens with their student at college. It can be unnerving to think about these topics. However college students make quick progress in managing their own health.

The Transition to Autonomy

In high school kids rely on us for healthy behaviors and managing their health. Students also rely on school nurses; this is a first step in managing their own health care. In college students are suddenly responsible for taking care of themselves. A lot happens very quickly.

There are developmental issues for kids at this age which shape their health behaviors. Risk taking affects their health and well being. They have a sense of invincibility - it can't happen to me - they feel magically protected. They are not always aware of what can happen. Dr. Petersen mentioned a student with an infection, who did not take his antibiotics for 2 weeks after being diagnosed. When asked why, he responded I was in California. Dr. Petersen asked if parents read the comic strip Zits. She said it is like living Zits at work.

Another developmental factor which influences students is that they are not very good at abstract reasoning. Their cognitive development is not complete. Students sometimes have problems in getting medical care because they have difficulty in describing symptoms. They can have right/left confusion and find it hard to step back and describe what is happening. When students are asked about their symptoms they sometimes reply I feel gross and the medical practitioner can't get their symptoms from them. Parents can help their child formulate their medical history for health care providers.

Peers are a very important factor in how students manage their care. Friends influence them for good or for bad. Peer hearsay is an influence. What are your kids friends saying?

Residual childhood fears also play a role in managing health care. Some students are skittish about getting care. Parents also have influence. Your student will turn to you maybe first or last.

Kids will look stuff up on the web, but will not always go to good sites. They learn very quickly from their experiences and if they have a bad experience they will not return.

Finances can affect the students health. If they are very short of cash they won't fill prescriptions. If they are out of cash they can't fill them. Parents need to think of a plan for that contingency.

Input from home can influence a students health. Kids can call home but won't always. Texting can work better. Kids will usually respond to a text message.

All schools have resources for students. Some have counseling and not health care. Counseling services are most important if resources are scarce. Health care systems at college are all different. There will always be some kind of health care services. Most offer urgent care and some will offer limited primary care and some gynecological care. All college health care systems offer immunizations and do communicable disease outbreak management. Many will have an on-call after hours system.

Most college health care services do little or no billing, this is important for student confidentiality. If the health care service billed it would be sent to your insurance company and they would generate paperwork which would include an Explanation of Benefits form. The EOB form might list specific tests or give other information about the students treatment. This can be a problem with parents. Some students would not go to the health care services if they knew that parents would receive information.

A parent asked Should we ask the school about billing? Dr. Petersen responded it would be a good idea. Some schools will pay for STD testing; some will allow a kid to pay in cash for services.

A parent asked What happens if your child has a chronic illness? Dr. Petersen said that the student health services will work with the primary care physician at home. They can manage the illness together.

Dr. Petersen mentioned that the average number of healthcare visits per year was 2.5-3 for women and 1-1.5 for men. A lot of visits are related to sexuality, alcohol use and living in close quarters. There is more stress on freshmen and therefore more visits than seniors. Our kids don't know how to manage routine illnesses (like a head cold) the way we do.

Privacy Protection

If your child is 18 years or older they are considered an adult. It is a statutory violation for a health care professional to speak to their parents without permission. If your child is 17, parents are required to hear about regular health issues but will not be told about issues around sexuality.

How should parents deal with privacy issues? There is no law saying that you can't call and speak with the director of the health services on campus. Parents should state I know that you can't talk to me but I'd like to share some information. The health care providers anticipate a battle when parents call because no information can be shared. They welcome parents who want to tell them about their child. This can be done with or without revealing the call to the student. Health care providers can do more if they can reveal that the parent has called.

Parents worry about what if my child is really sick, how will I find out? If a kid is really in trouble, at risk of death but not suicidal, Dr. Petersen said many health care directors if really worried would call the college dean. If a student was in trouble and really shouldn't be in school (i.e. as in the case of eating disorders), they would feel it necessary to speak to the dean. This is a violation (of privacy) but Dr. Petersen stated that most would rather be sued by a student for a violation of privacy than not tell a parent. Not all schools react the same way, but that is the general trend.

If a student were immediately suicidal or homicidal, the health services would intervene right away and would call the parents. The student would most likely be hospitalized.

Dr. Petersen added that parents should not try to get blanket authorization for the medical professionals to speak with them. This is not really legal and may make your kid reluctant to use the medical care.

Counseling

About 30 percent of students come to college on psychotropic drugs for conditions such as ADHD and depression. Every college has a different counseling policy. Some may limit visits others may not. There is no stigma to counseling in this generation and the demand is unlimited. The counseling professionals are bigger sticklers for privacy. If a kid was in real trouble, they would let someone know.

Checklist For College Health

Start on these items now.

Entrance College Health Forms: are required at most colleges. The forms include a health history and immunization record. This is important because kids don't always give good accurate information. They don't always know their medications and how to

spell them. This is important because there are many drug names that are very similar. Do the form together with your kids. Educate them and let them know that it is very important to know about. Some college health forms have sensitive questions. When you get to them, hand the form to your kid to finish and mail. The colleges won't tell you, but the student may need to turn in the form in order to register and pick up their keys. Some colleges are very strict about getting the entrance health form, but all will say so. Some schools will require a physical exam. Make sure to make the appointment in advance.

Immunization: Immunization requirements are quite strict. Some immunizations are required by state law. The HPV (human papilloma virus) is recommended for girls and is now FDA approved for boys. There have been no formal recommendations by any medical boards about giving it to boys. A parent asked if the vaccine is safe? Dr. Petersen answered very safe and very effective. We will see a significant decline in the rates of cervical cancer, although we see very little cervical cancer in this country. The vaccine does prevent abnormal PAP tests. Another parent asked if there is a downside to the vaccine? Dr. Petersen responded none except the cost, which leads to the greater question of how we spend healthcare dollars. Dr. Petersen also mentioned that HPV is associated in men with anal cancer (in the case of homosexual sex) and is also associated with head and neck cancer.

The meningitis vaccine is required by some schools. Dr. Petersen strongly urged that kids get the vaccine. Bacterial meningitis is not that common but if contracted is devastating and preventable.

Testing: Some schools require a TB (tuberculosis) test.

Learning Disability Testing: must be done within 3years of college.

Insurance: Many families have insurance which covers students through graduate school to age 26. If your student is on your plan there are several important things to think about. Will your insurance cover anything other than emergency services out of state? What if a student needs a surgical repair or physical therapy? Will the plan cover them at college or will they need to come home? Many plans will require them to come back for those services to be covered. Parents should check on Portability.

Almost all colleges offer an insurance plan that is relatively cheap. It can be a great supplement to your insurance. Look into it, some are great.

A parent asked Will the plans cover special treatment for chronic diseases? Dr. Petersen responded that most do, but check.

Dr. Petersen continued that students worry about using uncovered services outside the college health service. Cost is an issue.

A parent asked Is medication covered out of state? It is usually covered but check if your

health plan has a preferred pharmacy. Mail order pharmacies are great, they mail automatically so your kid doesn't have to remember to refill.

Prepare yourself for questions and problems (about our student's health). Ask your student What do you think? But have the answer ready.

A parent asked Can students go someplace and stay out of their rooms so the roommate won't get sick? Dr. Petersen said there is no space for that. She continued that most infections are transmitted from hand to mouth. Students should wash their hands and should use Purell to prevent infections. Infections are ubiquitous on campus. Some students are more susceptible than others. There are no sick rooms on campuses. There used to be an infirmary but they are very scarce. Kids would not use the infirmary now. Many colleges do have rooms that they can use for serious communicable diseases if the student can't go home.

A parent asked about treatment for an active chronic medical condition. Should a student get on or off campus care? Where would it be available? Dr. Petersen stated that if the care is too far away the student will not go. Most colleges offer primary care and some big health centers have specialty care on campus. You will need to work it out depending on the problem and where the college is located.

Parents should ask a local doctor for names of specialists in the colleges area. They can also ask the health service at the college. This is useful because they can recommend doctors who will work with college kids. Some doctors won't take care of young adults because they are notorious for missing appointments. Parents may have to work on reminding their student about special appointments. Dr. Petersen recommended making an appointment with a specialist now because there can be a long lead time for new patient appointments. Parents should also call with the health history for the specialist if their child won't. Parents also need a plan for dealing with the co-payments.

Discussions: Talk to your child now and keep talking while they are in college. Prioritize what is important and watch out for TMI (too much information). Treat your child as an adult friend. Use questions to facilitate the discussion. Don't force yourself on your kid. Try: What do you think? Do you mind being asked? If your kid says yes then say Ill ask you later. Don't just tell your kid what you think and what you want. Tell them it makes me worried that.... You can't control your kid but can partner with them about what they'll face.

Essential Topics for Discussion: Medical history including active medications and medication allergies, the role of the health insurance card and a plan for illness (contact student health or call home). Students should know the names of their medications and how to spell them. They should know their allergies and how to deal with payment for medical services.

Another topic you might want to discuss is how to manage a head cold. Do it in advance of the need.

First Aid Kit: Put together a first aid kit for your child to take to college. Add another copy of your child's health insurance card and information on referrals to the kit. (The original should be in their wallet and accessible.) Other items for the first aid kit should include the student's list of medications and allergies, reliable health information websites, hand sanitizer, band-aids, ibuprofen or naproxen, cold compounds for day and night, thermometer. Dr. Petersen warned about including and using acetaminophen (Tylenol). Many cold compounds contain acetaminophen and it can be dangerous to add more acetaminophen in. Students can use ibuprofen and a cold compound as most do not include ibuprofen. Also think of including a cough medicine with DM, which is the best over the counter alternative. A parent suggested packing an additional thermometer in another place than the first aid kit.

Reliable health information websites listed by Dr. Petersen are:

Uptodate.com

cdc.gov

intelihealth.com

goaskalice.columbia.edu

Dr. Petersen mentioned that Go Ask Alice is a very frank site located at Columbia University.

A parent asked how do you look for health care or mental health care off campus? Dr. Petersen suggested parents research who is in the area and set up consult appointments for the student. The student can then decide who to see after discussion with the parents.

Once School Begins

Parents should prepare for it all from a transient decompensation over a minor illness (the two minute turnaround) to a more sustained decompensation (what else is going on?) to inattention to something potentially serious. Students can have a meltdown and then be fine when a friend shows up. We can have a warped view if we call during the meltdown. If it continues we should ask what else happened?

When your child calls when they are sick ask What do you think you should do? They should help solve their own problem. Parents can ask How would you like me to help you? That way the student stays in charge. What should you do if they have a serious illness in school? Visit if you can, most students will welcome a visit. Parents can also call the college counseling service if they have something to report. If your student knows of a problem with a friend or roommate counsel them to report it. If they won't you should do so. College counseling services have someone on call 24/7 to take calls and they know what to do.

A parent commented that a difficult topic to discuss is germ transmission. Students share food and water bottles. People fall asleep on your bed and you move to someone else's bed. Dr. Petersen commented that the incidence of meningitis used to be very high in the freshman year because of the sharing. That is not true now, due to the vaccine.

A parent asked about head lice at college. Dr. Petersen said they don't see much of it.

A parent asked What do you do about a kid who is already germophobic? Reassure them that what they are doing is working. Should kids use shower shoes? Maybe. What about picking up MRSA in the gym? Dr. Petersen stated most cases happen with abraded skin and not so much with intact skin. She also suggested turning faucets off (in public bathrooms) with a paper towel and opening the door with a paper towel and then throwing the towel out. A parent asked about cleaning in communal bathrooms. They are cleaned by the college daily.

A parent asked if the colleges will talk about health care at parent orientation. Yes.

A parent asked if a child with a chronic health problem should have a primary care physician at school. Probably.ˆ