**We need more school nurses!**

Lived experience shared by Flo, now 28yrs old.

I went to a school of about 2,000 pupils and 100 teachers so it was quite easy to get lost. There was a high turnover of teaching staff and many of the students were from deprived or difficult backgrounds, so struggled to trust those in authority. There was someone who everyone trusted though, which was Debbie, our school nurse. She was a figure of constancy - having been at the school for well over a decade - approachable and non-judgmental. Two of my close friends went to her when they needed emergency contraception and support through the termination of a pregnancy - they didn't dare tell their family or any of the teachers, but they immediately went to Debbie.

Another friend with severe anorexia would spend every P.E lesson in Debbie's office - there wasn't any support available on the NHS for her and her mother regularly tried to force-feed her - so Debbie was the only trained professional support she had.

By the time I began suffering with severe anorexia, though, the nursing position at our school was being shared across multiple schools and Debbie had left. So, there wasn't the same constancy of support which in turn reduced the new nurse's ability to build up trust with the pupils. That meant I had no one to turn to about my illness, and my teachers were deeply unsympathetic - as I walked around the school with an inflatable ring cushion to make sitting down more comfortable, one of them asked me if I was going on holiday and another time he asked if I had haemorrhoids; another told me that I should "try to not be anorexic" because "people with anorexia get fat when they're older". I wonder how much better things would have been if we had had a school nurse able to train the teaching staff about mental health and eating disorders.

I know that Debbie made a huge difference to the lives and wellbeing of so many of the female students at our school. It wasn't just the medical support she gave - that was perhaps the least important part of it - it was the pastoral and compassionate presence, and the refuge of her office in an otherwise chaotic environment.