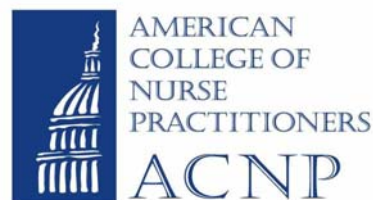


Frequently Asked Questions about Nurse Practitioners



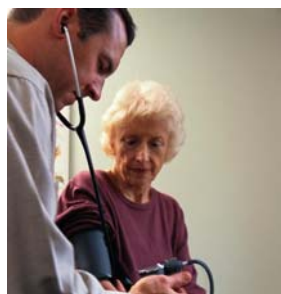
Who are Nurse Practitioners?

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are registered nurses who are prepared, through advanced education and clinical training, to provide a wide range of preventive and acute health care services to individuals of all ages. Today, NPs complete graduate-level education preparation that leads to a master's degree. NPs take health histories and provide complete physical examinations; diagnose and treat many common acute and chronic problems; interpret laboratory results and X-rays; prescribe and manage medications and other therapies; provide health teaching and supportive counseling with an emphasis on prevention of illness and health maintenance; and refer patients to other health professionals as needed. NPs are authorized to practice across the nation and have prescriptive privileges, of varying degrees, in 50 states. The most recent Health Resources and Services Administration Sample Survey report (2000) shows 102,829 Nurse Practitioners in the United States, an increase of more than 44 percent over 1996 data. The actual number of nurse practitioners in 2004 is estimated to be at least 115,000.



What is the history of the NP role?

Nurse practitioners have provided a healthy partnership with their patients for more than 35 years.



The nurse practitioner role had its inception in the mid-1960s in response to a nationwide shortage of physicians. The first NP Program was developed as a master's degree curriculum at the University of Colorado's School of Nursing in 1965, founded by Loretta C. Ford, a nursing faculty member and Dr. Henry K. Silver, a pediatrician. Programs were developed across the country to provide additional education for experienced nurses to enable them to provide primary health care services to large underserved populations. The first programs were in pediatrics and they soon spread to many other health care specialties.

Where do NPs practice?

Nurse practitioners practice in a variety of specialty areas and settings where health care services are provided for individuals and groups. These include: employee health services, health maintenance organizations (HMOs), home health care agencies, hospitals (inpatient and outpatient services), long term care facilities, NP-managed health centers, prisons and correctional institutions, private offices, psychiatric facilities, schools and college health services.

How cost-effective are nurse practitioners?

Very. NPs provide high-quality, cost-effective care. One study compared the costs of care for two primary care problems and found that the cost of care given by NPs was 20% less than the cost of care given by physicians.

How are NPs different from Physician Assistants (PAs)?

While NPs and PAs often perform similar functions, there are important distinctions between these health care professionals. PAs work under the supervision of a physician. They must meet the entrance requirements of a PA program, but that does not necessarily include a background in medicine or nursing. In contrast, NPs may work independently or in collaboration with a physician and must have an RN license before being accepted into an NP educational program. By 2003, almost all NPs were educationally prepared at the master's level. NPs are Registered Nurses and are authorized to practice as advanced practice nurses by individual state regulating boards. NPs assess patients, make diagnoses, and determine treatment plans.



Aspects of the role may include autonomous practice, collaboration with physicians, and prescriptive authority. Education of physician assistants is based on the medical model. PA programs may offer a bachelor's or a master's degree, or no degree if the PA is educated in a certificate program. PAs are supervised by a physician.

How do NPs feel about access to health care?

Access to cost-effective, quality health care is a right of every American. Furthermore, individuals should have the right to access the health care provider of their choice. Legislatures at the national and state levels should advocate for individuals to have reasonable access to health care services

NPs provide services for the diagnosis, treatment and management of disease as well as illness prevention and health maintenance. Numerous studies conclude that nurse practitioners perform as well as physicians in their specialty area of practice, in patient diagnosis, management of specific diseases and patient outcomes. NPs have improved access to and affordability of health care by consistently offering high quality and cost-effective services. Nurse practitioners should be active partners and providers of health care as they insure delivery of quality health care in a cost-effective manner.



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