

## **The Impact of Nurse Practitioners Practicing Independently**

## The Impact of Nurse Practitioners Practicing Independently

Imagine you are in an exam room at your local physician's clinic. You've got a cold, or some other general ailment, and you are waiting to be seen by your doctor for the very first time. An individual comes into the room and begins to start your examination when you notice: the white coat the "doctor" is wearing doesn't have the abbreviations M.D or D.O., but rather A.R.N.P. Now you're worried. You've made an appointment to see an intelligent, competent, and thoroughly taught physician, so you should only see a physician, right? Well, maybe not.

Nurse practitioners are registered nurses who must complete graduate-level courses to obtain a Master's degree in Science from an approved nursing program. They must also complete 500-700 clinical hours to obtain their advanced registered nurse practitioner license, or A.R.N.P. This in total will take an individual around 7-9 years to obtain. Requirements for obtaining the nurse practitioner license include receiving a bachelor's degree in Science and possessing a valid registered nurse license, though by 2015 they will have to complete a doctorate or DNP in nursing practice before obtaining their license (Nurse). Now let's compare this to a licensed medical doctor. A medical doctor is a practitioner of medicine as one graduated from a college of medicine. This consists of two degrees and clinical experience. After obtaining a Bachelor's degree, the individual will enter 4 years of medical school, followed by anywhere between 3-7 years of residency, and then the individual may possess the title of M.D. (Requirements). This would take around 11-15 years to obtain.

Although differences exist between the education and clinical hours of the two, particularly in specialty areas and length, there are many factors in the situation that patients may not be aware of. A licensed A.R.N.P. must possess a registered nurse's license just to apply to an

approved nursing program (Nurse). Registered nurses practice in all areas of the health care profession and most are working while going to school. By just going to work, the nurse gains clinical experience, especially if in a hospital or acute care facility. Although these hours are not recorded, the nurse is learning and utilizing clinical knowledge and hands on training in their every day lives. More experience makes a better nurse, and improves bedside manner.

The nurse practitioner is specifically trained to provide and manage care for patients in the clinical setting and some even argue that doctors may be over qualified for primary care practices (Mahar). Additionally, the number of medical students going into primary care is declining. More students are interested in specialty practices rather than primary care. Not only because of the student's interest in the field they have chosen, but also that specialty practice health care costs have increased. According to Medscape.com, "U.S. medical students, particularly those considering primary care but selecting controllable lifestyle specialties, are more likely to consider applying for a primary care specialty if provided a financial incentive" (DeZee).

Median income for a M.D. is around 186,000 dollars a year. The median income for an A.R.N.P is 83,000-86,000 dollars a year (Mahar). Health care costs are a serious problem for the general population, so if an A.R.N.P. has the ability to practice in a primary care setting without supervision, consequently health care costs are reduced. Reduced cost might even mean happier patients. Nurse practitioners are not trying to replace doctors, or pretending to be doctors. All that is wanted is to improve health care for everyone, and put more primary care providers into the work place, be it an M.D., or an A.R.N.P. Now the next time you see that the white coat has more than 2 letters on it, maybe you won't be so worried.

## Works Cited

DeZee, Kent J., M.D., M.P.H, Douglas Mourer, D.O., M.P.H., and others. "Effect of Financial Remuneration on Specialty Choice of Fourth-year U.S. Medical Students." Academic Medicine. February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. Medscape. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/736509>>

Mahar, Maggie. "The Battle over Letting Nurse Practitioners Provide Primary Care." Taking Note. April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. Taking Note: A Century Foundation. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<<http://takingnote.tcf.org/2010/04/the-battle-over-letting-nurse-practitioners-provide-primary-care-.html>>

Nurse, "Nurse Practitioner School Requirements and Prerequisites." Education Portal.com. 2011 April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. <[http://education-portal.com/nurse\\_practitioner\\_school\\_requirements.html](http://education-portal.com/nurse_practitioner_school_requirements.html)>

Requirements, "Requirements to Become a Doctor in the U.S." Education Portal.com. 2011. April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. <[http://education-portal.com/requirements\\_to\\_become\\_a\\_doctor.html](http://education-portal.com/requirements_to_become_a_doctor.html)>