

What is a Nurse Practitioner?

A nurse practitioner (NP) is a registered nurse with advanced academic and clinical experience, which enables him or her to diagnose and manage most common and many chronic illnesses, either independently or as part of a health care team. A nurse practitioner provides some care previously offered only by physicians and in most states has the ability to prescribe medications. Working in collaboration with a physician, a nurse practitioner provides high-quality, cost-effective and individualized care for the lifespan of patient's special needs.

NPs focus largely on health maintenance, disease prevention, counseling and patient education in a wide variety of settings. With a strong emphasis on primary care, nurse practitioners are employed within several specialties, including neonatology, nurse-midwifery, pediatrics, school health, family and adult health, women's health, mental health, home care, geriatrics and acute care.

Nurse practitioners are educated through programs that grant either a certificate or a master's degree. A registered nurse is recommended to have extensive clinical experience before applying to a nurse practitioner program. An intensive preceptorship under the direct supervision of a physician or an experienced nurse practitioner, as well as instruction in nursing theory, is key components to most NP programs.

Lastly, the scope of an NP's practice varies depending upon each state's regulations. Unnecessary obstacles to an NP's practice contribute to the rising costs and inaccessibility of health care for all Americans.

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