



For immediate release

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Lawmakers to study the role of nurse practitioners in improving Oklahomans' access to health care

Full practice authority for NPs could offer solution to primary care shortage

OKLAHOMA CITY (Nov. 3, 2015) -- Members of the House Public Health Committee will meet on Wednesday, Nov. 4, to study the role that nurse practitioners (NPs) can play in expanding access to primary care for all Oklahomans.

“Oklahoma already faces a shortage of primary care providers, particularly in rural areas, and that shortage will only become more acute as the population ages,” said Rep. Jon Echols, who requested the study. “The legislature has two options. One option is to do nothing and that is simply unacceptable. The other option is to explore creative solutions recognizing that nurse practitioners are an integral part of the health care process.”

By allowing nurse practitioners the authority to practice to the full scope of their abilities, we can ensure affordable and accessible primary care for more Oklahomans — not to mention shorter drives and wait times.”

Oklahoma is one of just 12 states that require all NPs to be supervised by a physician.

According to the most recent Oklahoma Health Workforce Databook compiled by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, 64 of Oklahoma’s 77 counties are designated as primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). More than 58 percent of Oklahomans live in a primary care HPSA. With 80.2 physicians for every 100,000 Oklahomans, the state ranks 49th in physician-patient ratio.

Damarcus Nelson, a spokesperson for the Association of Oklahoma Nurse Practitioners, said other states are already looking to lure away Oklahoma’s nurse practitioners.

“Twenty-one states, including New Mexico and Colorado, offer nurse practitioners full practice authority,” Nelson said. “Just a couple of years ago, New Mexico’s governor was encouraging Oklahoma’s NPs to relocate to that state. Oklahoma has an incredible resource in these highly-trained professionals, and we need to take advantage of their skills and training to improve the health of our state.”

A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse who is prepared, through advanced education and clinical training, to provide a wide range of preventative and health care services. NPs complete graduate-level education that leads to a master's or doctoral degree. NPs can provide 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 training and supportive counseling on the prevention of illness, and refer patients to other health professionals as needed.

Toni Pratt-Reid, a spokeswoman for the AONP, said granting full practice authority to NPs will benefit the state in many ways.

“With full practice authority, nurse practitioners can not only improve the health of our friends and neighbors, we can improve the economic health of our communities by opening clinics, hiring employees and spurring economic development,” Pratt-Reid said. “There are NPs in every corner of the state eager to put their advanced training and education to work improving Oklahoma.”

The interim study is slated to take place from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. in room 206 in the state Capitol.

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About the AONP

The Association of Oklahoma Nurse Practitioners represents more than 1,000 nurse practitioners and students. Its mission is to advance, support and promote the high standards of health care delivered by nurse practitioners and to improve patient access to quality, affordable health care.