



Full Practice Authority for Oklahoma Nurse Practitioners

Issue

By allowing nurse practitioners to practice at the full scope of their capabilities, Oklahoma would have an opportunity to increase access to affordable health care throughout the state, particularly in rural areas; improve public health; and offer consumers the freedom to make the health choices that are right for them and their families.

Background

A nurse practitioner (NP) is a registered nurse who is prepared, through advanced education and clinical training, to provide a wide range of preventative and health care services to individuals of all ages. NPs complete graduate-level education preparation that leads to a master's or doctoral degree. NPs 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 with an emphasis on the prevention of illness and health maintenance, and refer patients to other health professionals as needed.

Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia offer NPs full practice authority. Oklahoma is one of 12 states that require a physician to supervise NPs. Seventeen states have laws that fall between restricted practice and full practice authority for NPs.

Benefits of Full Practice Authority for NPs

The nation is facing a shortage of general practice physicians and NPs offer an obvious solution to fill this gap. According to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), the number of NPs in the United States doubled over the past decade. This year, *U.S. News* ranked nurse practitioner as the second-best job in the country. NPs could provide a solution to the shortage of primary care physicians, particularly in rural areas.

The neighboring states of New Mexico and Colorado offer NPs full practice authority. In 2013 New Mexico's governor suggested luring Oklahoma's NPs to that state with the promise of greater autonomy and freedom to practice.

Studies show that, on average, nurse practitioners spend more time with individual patients and are a more cost-effective solution to many health care needs. In addition, Oklahomans could benefit from shorter wait times and shorter drives to find quality medical care.

Allowing NPs to practice to the full extent of their education will not only improve access to quality health care for Oklahomans, it will increase consumer choice and address a critical shortage of primary care providers across the state.