

Editorial: Expand care with nurse practitioners

Scranton Times Tribune (and Pottsville Republican Herald)

Editorial Board

4/23/17

<http://thetimes-tribune.com/opinion/expand-care-with-nurse-practitioners-1.2183951>

<http://republicanherald.com/opinion/expand-care-with-nurse-practitioners-1.2185676>

Expanding access to health care without vastly increasing its cost is the holy grail of what has become the public policy debate of the age. Nationally and in Pennsylvania, the debate over the Affordable Care Act has been among the most polarizing of issues in an era of polarized politics.

A bill that has been reintroduced in the Pennsylvania Legislature offers the opportunity to cost-effectively expand health care access by granting greater autonomy to nurse practitioners.

The concept is controversial among elements of the health care community. The Pennsylvania Medical Society opposes it, contending that the current law requiring nurse practitioners to work under “collaborative agreements” with physicians offers the best combination of cost-effectiveness and safety.

Sponsor’s argument effective

But state Sen. Camera Bartolotta, a Republican from Monongahela, Washington County, and chief sponsor of the bill, makes an effective argument. She notes that about 35 percent of Pennsylvanians live in areas with inadequate access to primary health care. Moreover, expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act has increased the number of patients seeking care faster than providers have been able to accommodate them.

Increasing autonomy for advanced-practice registered nurses is a sound way to help meet the increased demand.

The bill, which has been approved by the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee, would allow a nurse practitioner to provide care without the supervision of a physician after completing a three-year, 3,600-hour collaboration agreement with a physician.

That independence is the law in 22 other states, and the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania and the National Academy of Medicine support the practice.

Lawmakers should pass the bill as a means of efficiently expanding health care access.