

Pa. lawmakers take up issue of expanding roles of nurse practitioners

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The state Senate is once again trying to address the shortage of general practice physicians by considering legislation that would expand the authority of nurses with advanced degrees.

The proposals would allow nurse practitioners and others to operate with much more autonomy.

Under current law, nurses with advanced degrees including certified nurse midwives must have a collaborative agreement with a physician to provide on demand consultations for their practice. But, Senate Bill 25 removes that restriction.

Pennsylvania Coalition of Nurse Practitioners President Lorraine Block says at times the agreement prevents nurses from running clinics in underserved areas.

"It's just not necessary. It's very expensive," she says. "Some nurse practitioners are paying tens of thousands of dollars a year for collaborative agreements, and the physicians are not providing direct input into their practice and so it's a very expensive mandate."

A similar measure passed the Senate last year but did not come up for a vote in the House.

This year's version adds a stipulation that an advance practice nurse cannot be granted autonomy until they have served under a physician for 3,600 hours over at least three years.

Block says that is more restrictive than any of the 22 other states that allow advanced nurses to practice without physician oversight.