

Pennsylvania battle over nurse practitioners is back on

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Debate about the role of nurse practitioners is heating up again in Pennsylvania, as a Senate committee approved a proposal similar to one that stalled after being approved by the full Senate last year.

Currently, nurse practitioners are required to have collaborative agreements with two doctors. Senate Bill 25 and House Bill 100 propose to lift that requirement and allow them to practice on their own after logging 3,600 hours under a collaborative agreement.

Opposing the legislation, strongly, is the Pennsylvania Medical Society. Supporting the legislation are organizations ranging from the Hospital & Health system Association of Pennsylvania to AARP to Pennsylvania Health Access Network.

Supporters point out that 22 states currently give nurse practitioners full practice authority under the state board of nursing to do everything their certification allows, without requiring doctors to be involved. They say that leads to higher quality, increased access and lower cost.

Opponents say giving nurse practitioners full practice authority has not substantially decreased costs or increased access to care, with those states continuing to struggle with the same issues Pennsylvania faces. They also say it's vital that doctors lead health care teams, emphasizing that completing medical school and residency takes seven years, while becoming a nurse practitioner takes three years or less of graduate school.