

Evolution of Nurse Practitioners in Hyperbaric Medicine

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Introduction

With implementation of the Affordable Care Act, 30 million more Americans may obtain health insurance. This will require the utilization of Nurse Practitioners (NPs) across all practice settings to meet increased need for healthcare services¹. The Institute of Medicine Future of Nursing Recommendations states that “Advance practice registered nurses should be able to practice to the full extent of their education and training”². According to American Association of Nurse Practice³, currently 18 states and the District of Columbia allow NPs to have Full Practice Authority (FPA). With hyperbaric/wound clinics on the rise, NPs are a viable option to assure the future of direct patient attendance within the Hyperbaric Medicine setting and to ensure safe, effective delivery of hyperbaric oxygen therapy. The purpose of this review was an attempt to reconcile the pros, cons, discriminations and paradigms concerning the debate over granting nurse practitioners FPA to meet expanding healthcare needs.

Methods

A systematic query of available literature in the PubMed, CINAHL, and Medline databases was performed using the combined keywords – “nurse practitioner” and “full practice authority”.

Nurse Practitioners Solution to Provider Shortage

- The need for qualified health care professionals has never been greater. By 2020, the nation will require an additional 15,000 providers (40% more) to meet the target ratio of one primary care provider per every 3,500 residents.
- This shortage is expected to worsen over the next 10 years due to the rapidly aging population of the U.S. and the retirement of nearly one-third of all doctors. Longer life expectancies will increase the number of Americans who will require primary care as well as chronic disease management.¹
- A viable option to increase primary care capacity is the revision of state laws governing NPs scope of practice (SOP) to grant Full Practice Authority (FPA).
- These laws limit the potential for NPs to alleviate the increased demand on the primary care workforce.
- Currently, 18 states plus the District of Columbia permit FPA for licensed and certified NPs.²
- Funding authorized by the Affordable Care Act included \$30 million to cover educational expenses to train 600 nurse practitioners.³

Results

Data indicated a clear disparity between the level of care that NPs are equipped to deliver and what outdated state practice laws allow them to deliver. Resolving this disparity will serve to reduce some of the difficulties patients encounter when seeking healthcare, such as adequate supervision during hyperbaric oxygen therapy, and increase the safety and efficacy of treatments with improved outcomes.

Conclusion

These data argue against ideologies that have previously dominated healthcare and are no longer valid. The data further suggests that NPs can safely and effectively help to alleviate pressure on the primary care workforce, including Hyperbaric Medicine. This data further highlighted the need for consistency in each state’s scope of practice regulations and its implications for both providers and patients.

Scope of Practice

