

Nurse Practitioner FAQ's

Q. What is a nurse practitioner?

The definition of a nurse practitioner is often debated. The scope of practice for nurse practitioners can vary slightly, dependent upon the state in which they choose to practice. The following definitions summarize the basic role of the nurse practitioner.

The United States Department of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics) defines the nurse practitioner as: A nurse practitioner may diagnose and treat acute, episodic or chronic illness, independently or as part of a healthcare team. A nurse practitioner may focus on health promotion and disease prevention; order, perform or interpret diagnostic tests such as lab work and x rays; may prescribe medication; and must be registered nurses who have specialized graduate education.

The nurse practitioner (NP) is an advanced practice nurse who provides primary and specialty care to patients and families. As an NP, you're able to examine and diagnose patients, prescribe medication, recommend treatment, make referrals and give independent individualized care while promoting good health and disease prevention.

Q. What is an advanced practice nurse?

An advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) is a registered nurse with advanced clinical education and training beyond that of the basic nursing training. The minimum requirement is a master's degree in one of the following specialties: nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, nurse anesthetist or nurse midwife.

Q. In what areas of healthcare do nurse practitioners work?

Generally speaking, nurse practitioners may practice in a wide variety of healthcare settings. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that as of 2010 approximately 52 percent of nurse practitioners in the US practice in the primary care arena.

Currently there are 12 nationally recognized ANCC (American Nurses Credentialing Center) board certifications available to nurse practitioners. NPs practice in a variety of settings, including hospitals, physician offices, emergency rooms, schools, occupational health and urgent-care centers. Nurse practitioners practice in the most rural settings as well as inner city environments. Nurse practitioners may also choose to specialize in fields such as cardiology, pediatrics, oncology, palliative care, internal and family medicine, psychiatric, surgery, neurology, critical care or geriatrics just to name a few. Nurse practitioners may also serve in the military with careers in the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines.

Q. How do I become a nurse practitioner?

A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse with graduate level education and advanced clinical experiences. NPs must first complete basic nursing education and licensure at the bachelor of science (BSN) level followed by either a graduate level of education with a masters or doctoral concentration. The doctoral education component for nurse practitioners has traditionally been for those of an academic tract but is now being explored as the minimal educational level for nurse practitioners. There have been several position statements by nursing bodies to require nurse practitioners to enter practice at the doctoral level, but currently the minimum requirement for certification and licensure is at the master's level.

Q. What are the market and salary expectations for nurse practitioners?

Medical Care (July 2012) states that the number of nurse practitioners should double by 2025. There are multiple reasons for the growing need for nurse practitioners, including include a rise in the aging population, healthcare reform and a shortage of physicians.

A December 2008 report on the physician work force by the Health Resources and Services Administration found that the United States will require approximately 976,000 physicians by 2020, but will only have 926,000 available in practice.

According to the Pearson Report in 2011 there were 180,233 nurse practitioners in the US. Pennsylvania ranked 5th (7,545 / 4.1%) in the country behind Claifornia (17,032), New York (16,031), Florida (12,677) and Texas (9,713).

Advance for NP's and PA's completed a salary survey that reported the average salary for a nurse practitioner in 2010 was \$90,770. This article also reports this is an 18% salary increase since 2005 (\$74,812). The survey also revealed that on average, in 2010, the top compensation specialties were emergency department (\$104,459), aesthetics/skin care (\$102,457) and mental health (\$100,914). The least compensating specialties were elementary or secondary school (\$77,513), cademia (\$80,400) and women's health (\$83,687).