

A Workforce Snapshot of Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioners in Ontario



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THE ISSUE

Policy decisions to support the Nurse Practitioner (NP) role especially in rural and remote areas have resulted in expansion of the role across the province, yet NPs perceive that legislation has lagged and limits their ability to meet patient and health system needs.

THE PURPOSE

To survey all practicing NPs in Ontario to obtain information and develop a public electronic registry about practice demographics, geographic distribution, employment trends, and practice patterns.

What did we do?

A questionnaire was distributed to 621 NP's (Registered Nurses with Extended Class (EC) category) registered with the College of Nurses in Ontario. The survey included 35 items divided into sections pertaining to educational and practice preparation, the amount of time in the role, a profile of practice settings and populations, employment profile and a profile of the practice. The survey also encouraged general comments related to funding, barriers and satisfaction with the NP role.

What did we find?

A total of 371 (60%) responses were analyzed. Key findings showed:

- 87% completed the Primary Healthcare Nurse Practitioner (PHCNP) certification process
- 76% of NPs are educated at the baccalaureate level
- 37% of NP's worked primarily in community health centers
- 57% work in underserved areas
- NP employment in acute care hospitals increased from 4% to 13.5% in 2002
- The number of NP's who provide home care rose from 48% in 2002 to 60% in 2005
- The majority of NP's work in collaborative practice with physicians
- Health Promotion and disease prevention continue to be a major focus of the PHC NP's practice.

The primary barrier to NP role integration was inability for NPs to work to their full scope of practice. Additional barriers to full role utilization continue to be:

- Poor understanding of the NP role among physicians, employers and the public
- Restrictive drug, lab and prescribing lists
- Lack of remuneration/funding

How will this research help?

The results of this study indicate that NPs have made some progress in the advancement of their roles and can provide comprehensive healthcare services to a broad range of clients, age groups and communities. However policy decisions are needed to address the identified barriers to full role implementation.

What's next?

There is a need to: 1) better educate healthcare team members, employers and the public regarding the NP role, 2) stabilize funding mechanisms to support the role, and 3) remove unnecessary restrictions related to drug, lab and prescribing lists.

BOTTOM LINE?

Barriers that limit maximizing the full value of the NP's role are still evident and must be addressed before full integration of the NP role in Ontario can be realized.

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