

Measuring Factors that Influence Nurse Practitioner (NP) Activities and the Implications for Optimizing NP Patient Panel Size in Primary Healthcare (PHC) Settings

By: Jennifer Rayner¹, Denise Bryant-Lukosius², Faith Donald¹, Ruth Martin-Misener³, Nicole Bennewies¹

THE ISSUE

A key objective in the Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care is to improve patient access to care when and where they need it. Nurse practitioners (NPs) are an integral part of this plan and it is important that decision makers and health care administrators understand how to maximize and measure the work done by NPs.

Panel size is the number of patients that a provider is responsible for. Optimizing the patient panel size of NPs in primary healthcare (PHC) is essential for effective team functioning, health workforce planning and timely access to high quality patient care. No studies have directly measured NP activities or explored factors that influence panel size in PHC settings.

THE PURPOSE

To identify and understand factors that influence NP patient panel size in Ontario.

What are we doing?

We've updated a review of the literature on NP patient panel size. We've also conducted a one-day meeting with key stakeholders to interpret the findings for Ontario. These stakeholders provided feedback on study research methods and findings.

We are presently conducting multiple case studies to measure NPs' activities and explore factors that influence their activities. Data will be collected in eight diverse PHC settings using a mixed methods approach including: organizational and NP surveys, direct observation using a time and motion tool, patient surveys, and qualitative interviews.

Scoping Review Findings

NP patient panel size is influenced by patient factors, such as age and complexity, provider factors, such as years of experience, organizational factors, such as the number of examination rooms and support staff, and system factors, such as legislation and policy.

How will this research help?

This project seeks to optimize patient panel size for NPs in PHC and inform planning and future evaluations of team performance in Ontario by improving our understanding of how organizational, NP and patient characteristics influence NP activities in PHC.

What is Next?

Over the next few months the research team will visit 8 primary health care clinics and collect data. We will also address three applied health research questions related to how NPs report on their activities using data, outcomes of NP care as well as collect data from Ontario NPs about panel size in their practice.

Bottom Line

Improved access to quality primary health care is a priority for strengthening the health care system in Ontario. NPs play a pivotal role in the delivery of high quality primary health care services.

Optimizing NPs' patient panel sizes is key to achieving access that meets the needs of patients in Ontario's communities.

This research is supported by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

¹ Ryerson University, ² McMaster University, ³ Dalhousie University

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Faith Donald, Associate Professor, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria St. Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
Phone : 416-979-5000, 1-6309, Email: fdonald@ryerson.ca

RESEARCH TEAM: Faith Donald, Ruth Martin-Misener, Kelley Kilpatrick, Denise Bryant-Lukosius, Ivy Lynn Bourgeault, Nancy Carter, Noori Akhtar-Danesh, Rick Glazier, Jennifer Rayner & Nicole Bennewies