

THE NURSE PRACTITIONER

A Strategy for Healthcare System Improvement



THE ISSUE

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) can be better utilized to improve healthcare system efficiency, access and quality. NPs contribute to **better care** for individuals, **better health** for populations and **lower healthcare costs**.

BACKGROUND

- ▶ NPs are registered nurses who are licensed in all provinces and territories to autonomously diagnose, prescribe medications, order and interpret diagnostic tests, and perform specific clinical procedures.
- ▶ NPs focus on health promotion, disease prevention and acute and chronic illness management.
- ▶ NPs provide services to patients across the lifespan, families, groups and communities.
- ▶ NPs have existed in Canada for over 40 years. They work collaboratively within interprofessional teams in primary healthcare, long-term care and acute care settings.

KEY MESSAGES

Better Care for Individuals

- NPs increase access to high quality care in primary healthcare clinics, reduce wait times in emergency departments and increase timeliness of care in nursing homes.
- In the community, NPs promote wellness by providing preventive care, treating minor acute illness, and managing chronic diseases.
- In hospitals, NPs enhance continuity of care for seriously ill and complex care patients.
- NPs coordinate patient treatment and initiate appropriate and timely consultation or referral when the problem exceeds their scope of practice or expertise.
- Physicians and NPs working together improve continuity of care, interprofessional team planning, hospital discharge processes and post-discharge follow-up.
- Patients consistently report high levels of satisfaction with NP care.

Better Health for Populations

- The presence of NPs in a variety of healthcare service delivery models is associated with high-quality disease

management for chronic but stable conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure and improved patient outcomes.

- NPs increase access to primary healthcare for vulnerable isolated groups, people living in rural and remote regions, and Aboriginal Peoples.
- NPs in acute care improve the health outcomes of high risk patient populations in units such as neonatology, cardiology, neurosurgery, and intensive care.

Lower Costs

- In the community, NPs reduce costs in the care of general practice patients and specific patient populations such as those with diabetes, eczema, and those who live in rural areas.
- In hospitals, NPs improve patient readiness for discharge which leads to shorter length of stay and fewer re-admissions.
- In long-term care, NPs provide timely assessment, diagnosis and treatment for acute and episodic conditions and injuries which reduces avoidable transfers of residents to the emergency department.

Investment in the NP role will lead to health system improvements through better access to high quality cost-effective care.

For more information: www.apnnursingchair.mcmaster.ca | For references: www.apnnursingchair.mcmaster.ca/documents/NP_BN_ref.pdf