

Nurse Practitioners

Working in Partnership with the Health Care Team

Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with the education and skills to provide a broad range of health care services. Nurse practitioners integrate elements such as diagnosing, prescribing, ordering diagnostic tests and managing common acute conditions and chronic illnesses into their practice. Most nurse practitioners in British Columbia have substantial nursing experience in a health care setting and have completed two years of graduate nursing education (Masters of Science in Nursing). Like all registered nurses, they work closely and collaboratively with members of the health care team including physicians, pharmacists, other nurses, physical therapists, speech/language pathologists and others.

What is the role of a nurse practitioner?

Nurse practitioners are educated to work in partnership with physicians and other health care providers to keep families and communities well. Nurse practitioners manage common acute and chronic illness and offer preventative health education and planning that encourages clients to be as healthy as possible and take an active role in health care decisions.

A nurse practitioner is able to carry out some activities that are commonly performed by physicians. While there is some overlap, the medical conditions nurse practitioners take responsibility for are less complicated than those a physician takes responsibility for. In addition to the focus on health promotion and disease prevention that nurse practitioners share with registered nurses, they also diagnose and treat common acute and chronic diseases. A nurse practitioner is part of a health care team while physicians diagnose and treat complex diseases.



What is the Health Professions Act?

The Health Professions Act is the framework that allows health professions to be self-governing. The governing body is called a “College” and consists of members elected from the profession and members of the public. The College ensures the protection of the public by setting educational and other requirements for entry to the profession, establishing standards of practice and ethics, providing for quality assurance and where necessary, conducting investigations and disciplinary proceedings.

How does someone become a nurse practitioner?

There are only two ways to become registered as a nurse practitioner in British Columbia.

- 1) A Masters of Science in Nursing degree can be obtained from an approved nurse practitioner program.
- 2) Registered nurses who can demonstrate to the College that they have the education and accumulated experience to match the level of education provided in the Masters of Nursing, can participate in a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). Registered nurses who do not meet the criteria may have to take additional courses. A nurse practitioner educated outside of British Columbia who wishes to work within British Columbia also has to complete the PLAR process.

Do nurse practitioners specialize in certain areas?

Nurse practitioners register within one of three broadly-based streams: family (all ages), adult, and pediatric, and have the required knowledge and skill for that stream. Within these streams, nurse practitioners may focus their practice on areas such as geriatrics, mental health or neonatology.

A nurse practitioner is recognized to practice within a particular practice area and not others. For example, a nurse practitioner whose education and experience allows for practice in the area of adult care is not permitted to practice in pediatrics, by reason of being registered as an adult nurse practitioner.

Do Nurse Practitioners prescribe medication?

Nurse practitioners are authorized to prescribe medication. Like all health professions, what and how they can prescribe is determined by the regulations set out by government and their College.

When do NPs Refer or Consult with physicians?

Nurse practitioners work independently. In other words, they are not supervised by a physician. However, as part of their education, nurse practitioners learn when and how to consult and collaborate with other health care professionals on the health care team. The goal is to ensure patients receive safe, competent and ethical health care. Nurse practitioners speak directly to their patient if they feel there is a need to transfer the patient's care to a physician. Although they do not diagnose and treat cancers, they do screen for some (for example, breast, cervical and prostate cancers). Nurse practitioners can diagnose some chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. They do not diagnose neurological diseases like Parkinson's, epilepsy or multiple sclerosis.

For Additional Information:

The Health Professions Act

http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/H/96183_01.htm

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2003 (Third Reading Bill)

http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/37th4th/3rd_read/gov62-3.htm

Nurses (Registered) and Nurse Practitioners Regulation

http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/leg/pdfs/Proposed_Nurses_and_NPs_Reg_Nov_2004.pdf

Nursing Directorate Home Page

<http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/ndirect/index.html>

Legislation and Professional Regulation Home Page

<http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/leg/index.html>

Health Professions Council — RN Scope of Practice Preliminary Report

<http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/leg/hpc/review/part-i/scope-regnurse.html>

Post-hearing update: <http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/leg/hpc/review/part-i/update-regnurse.html>

Health Professions Council — Legislative Review Preliminary Report

<http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/leg/hpc/review/part-ii/legs-nurse.html>

Other Canadian Sites:

College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia

<http://www.crnbc.ca>

Canadian Nurses Association

http://www.cna-nurses.ca/cna/default_e.aspx

Canadian Health Services Foundation (CHSRF)

<http://www.chsrf.ca>