



The Nurse Practitioner Role

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Q: How did you become interested in nursing?

I remember as a little girl getting a book about Florence Nightingale. This simple book became the soil in which my nursing career was first nourished. Once in Junior High School (yes I really meant to say Junior High!) other seeds were planted that germinated my interest further toward nursing and by the time I was in High School, I knew that nursing was the direction I would pursue. I can't really point a finger to just one moment or event in time when I decided on nursing as a profession. Rather it was more of a calling in my soul that continued to draw me closer to choosing nursing as the profession for my life. I think there are characteristics that I had that related well with the nursing profession, such as an interest in and caring for people, being comfortable around people, having the ability to communicate well (I can talk your leg off!), and loving the life sciences (Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, Microbiology, etc.). Yes, I said loving the Sciences! I didn't think these subjects were easy, but I enjoyed learning about how the body was put together and worked and how disease processes impact health. It was all intriguing.

After High School I was accepted into a Diploma nursing program where I completed my initial nursing education in three years. Now when I entered nursing school, I thought nurses would only work in a hospital or doctor's office. What I learned was that nursing provided multiple career options in various settings.

Have you ever heard of the Cherry Ames Nursing Series by Helen Wells? These books depicted all types of roles for nursing in fictional novel format. Cherry work on cruise ships, ranches, in surgery, private duty, and the list goes on. In fact there are 27 books in the original series. (I have them all!) How would I ever decide on what path and/or place in which I would practice nursing? I had never even heard of a nurse practitioner. During my Diploma years, it was my faculty, though, who planted the seeds and piqued my interest in becoming a nurse practitioner. They encouraged me to pursue further education and to consider other options in an advanced nursing role. While I did begin working on my Bachelor's Degree in Nursing immediately following graduation from nursing school, I did not pursue becoming a nurse practitioner until later in my career. Now I have to say that during all the years that I worked as a nurse in various roles, I always felt drawn to do more. To move toward a more advance role in nursing so that I could provide nursing care in a totally different way, more advance way, to better the health of individual patients.

Q: What kind of educational preparation does a Nurse Practitioner need?

I am a Family Nurse Practitioner, certified through the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and working for a large physicians group in northeast Indiana in a women's health specialty. This required that I complete a Master's Degree in Nursing with a specific education focus in a nurse practitioner track. Then I had to successfully pass a national certification exam. I chose this specific nurse practitioner track because of the diversity of options in which I might work. Many family nurse practitioners work in primary care offices, urgent care, pediatric offices, outpatient clinics, occupational health, women's health, public health offices, community health, and the list could go on. There are even other specialty nurse practitioner roles such as geriatric nurse practitioners, and



neonatal nurse practitioners – all of which require different educational programs leading to an MSN degree and a certification to practice.

Q: So what does a nurse practitioner do?

I first and foremost see myself as part of the overall health care team. Currently I work in an OB/GYN office providing annual exams, assuring that patients understand and know about the importance of preventative screening tests such as mammograms and colonoscopies, that they receive important immunizations as indicated by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and that health needs are addressed such as maintaining appropriate weight, exercise and dietary needs. I also see prenatal patients and monitor fetal growth and overall pregnancy outcomes for patients. For those patients that are ill, I order the appropriate lab or diagnostic tests to determine a plan for treatment or referral. I prescribe medications when needed, and follow up on the patient's progress toward recovery to a healthy state. I educate the patient on anything from normal pregnancy to how to use medication appropriately. I collaborate with others to ensure the best outcome for my patients. Some problems that I deal with are like puzzle pieces and it takes a little time to make sure that you put all the pieces together to see the whole picture. Each patient is a different picture! Most of all I listen. Patients are the best source of information and my goal is to empower them to be the healthiest they can be. Overall, nursing is very wellness oriented and practices a philosophy focused on keeping people well and if a person becomes ill, working to restore health and productivity. That is what I do!

Remember when I spoke of being part of the health care team? All this happens within a team. In the office where I currently work, my team consists of a physician, a nurse, and several medical assistants and of course myself. My nurse practitioner role is a perfect fit and complement to what the physician does. The relationship that I have experienced with my collaborative physician has been exceptional. We are a team and are able to work and assist each other in providing good patient care. Other valuable members of the team include physical therapist, pharmacists, registered dietitians, and other specialty physicians (to list a few!). We together ensure that patients receive the services needed.

I love being a nurse practitioner and caring for patients! All my nursing experiences, all the education that I completed, and all the patients that inspire me each working day bring fulfillment, richness, and gratitude to my advanced role as a nurse.

Author Information:

Amy Knepp is a Family Nurse Practitioner for Parkview Physicians Group in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She received her Diploma in Nursing from Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing, a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing and Master's Degree in Nursing from University of Saint Francis. She has received her certification as a Family Nurse Practitioner through the American Association of Nurse Practitioners.