

Nurse Practitioners in the Emergency Department

Purpose

The College of Emergency Nursing Australasia (CENA) is the peak professional nursing body representing Australasian emergency nurses. This position statement outlines the College's position regarding Nurse Practitioners in the Emergency Department (ED).

Definition

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency's (AHPRA) Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, herein referred to as the Board, define the nurse practitioner (NP) as "...an advanced practice nurse endorsed by the Board to practice within their scope under the legislatively protected title nurse practitioner".¹ The scope of practice of a Board endorsed NP consists of advanced, autonomous and collaborative practice within a nursing model of care. This includes comprehensive physical assessment, use of diagnostic investigations, diagnosis, treatment, prescribing, referral and clinical leadership.¹

Background

Nurse practitioners in the ED provide complete occasions of service within Board defined and individually agreed NP scope of practice. Autonomous NP assessment, diagnosis and management is provided to people of all age groups who seek emergency care. Nurse Practitioners are highly skilled clinicians who have the authority to prescribe medications, provide health related education and directly refer patients to other health care professionals as part of the patient's managed care.

The scope of practice of emergency NPs is influenced by the emergency settings in which they practice, the health needs of the community, the level of competence and confidence of the NP, and the policies of the service provider. According to these influences, evidence-based NP scope of practice are developed collaboratively with NPs, employers and defined stakeholders² to improve local, emergency healthcare provision.

As clinical leaders, NPs are key to strategic service delivery, identifying gaps in healthcare service provision, identifying and leading clinical research, championing change to improve patient care and safety, supporting the development of policy and standards for better service delivery, providing education through clinical supervision and education programs and acting as a role model and mentor to other emergency nurses.³ Internationally, the NP role in the ED has been shown to reduce patient waiting times,⁴ ED length of stay,⁵ increase patient safety⁶ and cost-effective.⁷ Within Australia, the role of the NP has increasingly been praised by both patients and clinicians for improving patient flow workload.⁸⁻¹⁰

Emergency Nurse Practitioners are effective, safe and efficient providers of health care, providing advanced autonomous practice. It is the College's position that the Emergency Nurse Practitioner role is comprehensively supported within all Australasian EDs.

The leaders for emergency nursing: A leader of emergency care.

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Position

1. The NP role is implemented and integrated into emergency services to address patient healthcare needs, support the provision of high quality emergency care and enhance access to emergency healthcare services where need is identified.
2. Nurse practitioners are recognized as a member of the nursing leadership team and are promoted as key nursing clinicians within the multidisciplinary emergency care team.
3. Nurse practitioners meet patients' needs holistically within multidisciplinary, collaborative models of care.
4. Employers and NPs work together to develop a defined scope of practice that is evidence-based and is in accordance with patient needs, local policies and national standards.
5. Nurse practitioners are supported and permitted to practice to the fullest extent of their scope of practice.
6. Nurse practitioners are supported to meet their professional development responsibilities and maintain their competence to practice.
7. Nurse practitioners are supported to expand and extend their scope of practice based on population and organisational needs.
8. Nurse practitioners are supported to contribute to patient quality and safety initiatives, research, education programs and other clinical leadership activities.
9. Nurse practitioners are involved in the development and evaluation of models of care and services across local and area health networks.

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References

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