Nurse Practitioners: Filling the Gaps in Primary Care

As the U.S. population ages and expands, and millions of previously uninsured individuals gain access to health coverage in 2014, the demand for primary care physician services is projected to outstrip supply. Nurse Practitioners can play a key role in the U.S. healthcare system by filling the gaps in primary care services and providing greater access to high quality care.

There is a Growing Shortage of Primary Care Physicians in the United States.

- According to the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, aging, population growth and insurance coverage expansion will cause an increase in demand for primary care services, resulting in a projected shortage of 20,400 primary care physicians by 2020.¹
- In a 2012 study, researchers estimated that the total number of office visits to primary care physicians will increase from 462 million in 2008 to 565 million in 2025.²
- The number of primary care physicians is projected to increase by only 8% from 2010 to 2020,³ and only 12% of U.S. physician graduates for all specialties were primary care matches.⁴

Greater Utilization of Nurse Practitioners Will Help Solve the Shortage of Primary Care Physicians.

- In contrast to the slow growth rate of primary care physicians, the overall number of trained NPs is predicted to increase by 30% from 55,400 in 2010 to 72,100 in 2020.⁵
- According to the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, 89% of NPs are trained in primary care, and more than 75% practice in primary care settings.⁶ Based on HRSA’s National Sample Survey of Nurse Practitioners, 60,407 NPs practiced primary care in 2012.
- By increasing the use of nurse practitioners and physicians assistants in the delivery of primary care, the physician shortage could be somewhat alleviated.⁷

³ Supra. no. 1
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