

Key research and evidence

The case for employing nurses in general practice

General practice nursing is a new and evolving profession. There are exciting opportunities to support nurses to be part of the general practice team and improve the health outcomes of individuals and communities. Engaging with the evidence base provides practices with the opportunity to realise the potential of integrating general practice nurses into the primary health care team.

How can nurses contribute to my general practice?

Nurses working in general practice undertake a breadth of work and can make a significant difference to the level of care provided within a practice. This work can include health promotion, disease prevention, palliative care, advocacy, research, policy planning and development, and education for health professionals and patients. Significant research has been undertaken regarding the evolving role of general practice nurses in Australia and how they can improve individual and community health outcomes. Some of this research includes:

- Halcomb E, Davidson P, Daly J, Griffiths R, Yallop J, Tofler G. *Nursing in Australian general practice: Directions and perspectives*. Australian Health Review. 2005;29(2):156-66. Accessed April 2015
www.publish.csiro.au/paper/AH050156.htm
- Deloitte Centre for Health Solutions. *Primary care today and tomorrow: Improving general practice by working differently*. London: Deloitte, 2012.
- Halcomb E, Patterson E, Davidson P. *Evolution of practice nursing in Australia*. Journal of Advanced Nursing. 2006;55(3):376-88.
- Halcomb EJ, Davidson PM, Patterson E. *Exploring the development of Australian general practice nursing: Where we have come from and where to from here?* Contemporary Nurse. 2007 Aug;26(1):145-53. PubMed PMID: 18041995. Epub 2007/11/29. Accessed April 2015
search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;res=IELHEA;dn=639136214931673
- Parker R, Walker L, Hegarty K. *Primary care nursing workforce in Australia: A vision for the future*. Australian Family Physician. 2010 Mar;39(3):159-60. PubMed PMID: 20369120. Epub 2010/04/07.
- Phillips C, Pearce C, Hall S, Kljakovic M, Sibbald B, Dwan K, Porritt J, Yates R. *Enhancing care, improving quality: The six*

roles of the general practice nurse. Medical Journal of Australia. 2009;191(2):92-7. Accessed April 2014
www.mja.com.au/journal/2009/191/2/enhancing-care-improving-quality-six-roles-general-practice-nurse

- Pilotto LS, Smith BJ, Heard AR, McElroy HJ, Weekley J, Bennett P. *Trial of nurse-run asthma clinics based in general practice versus usual medical care*. Respiriology. 2004 Aug;9(3):356-62. PubMed PMID: 15363008.
- Porritt J. *Policy development to support nursing in Australian general practice: An overview*. Contemporary Nurse. 2007 2007/08/01;26(1):56-64.
- Renders CM, Valk GD, Griffin SJ, Wagner E, van Eijk JTM, Assendelft WJJ. *Interventions to improve the management of diabetes mellitus in primary care, outpatient and community settings*. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews [Internet]. 2000;(4). Available from:
www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsysrev/articles/CD001481/frame.html
- Sargent GM, Forrest LE, Parker RM. *Nurse delivered lifestyle interventions in primary health care to treat chronic disease risk factors associated with obesity: A systematic review*. Obesity Reviews. 2012;in press.
- Schadewaldt V, Schultz T. *Nurse-led clinics as an effective service for cardiac patients: Results from a systematic review*. 2011 Sep;9(3):199-214. PubMed PMID: 21884449.
- Zwar NA, Richmond RL, Forlonge G, Hasan I. *Feasibility and effectiveness of nurse-delivered smoking cessation counselling combined with nicotine replacement in Australian general practice*. Drug and Alcohol Review. 2011;30(6):583-8.
- Walker L, Patterson E, Wong W, Young D. *General Practice Nursing*. NSW. 2010.

Financing nurses in general practice – Issues and impacts

In recognition of the importance of nurses in general practice and the challenges of ensuring a viable workforce into the future, the Australian Government offers financial incentives to encourage uptake of nurses in general practice, particularly through the Practice Nurse Incentive Program (PNIP). There is evidence of a spectrum of financing models within general practices, and that current financing models have benefits and challenges.



Some research in this area includes:

- Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association *National Salary and Conditions Survey 2013*; www.apna.asn.au/lib/pdf/Careers/SalaryandConditions/2013APNASalaryandConditionsSummary.pdf Accessed December 2014
- Helms C, Crookes J, Bailey D. *Financial viability, benefits and challenges of employing a nurse practitioner in general practice*. Australian Health Review. 2014 Dec 22. doi: 10.1071/AH13231. Accessed April 2014 www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view_file&file_id=AH13231.pdf
- Laurant M, Reeves D, Hermens R, Braspenning J, Grol R, Sibbald B. *Substitution of doctors by nurses in primary care*. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews [Internet]. 2004;(4). Available from: www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsystrev/articles/CD001271/frame.html
- Pearce C, Phillips C, Hall S et al. *Following the funding trail: Financing, nurses and teamwork in Australian General Practice*. BMC Health Services Research. 2011;11(38). Accessed April 2014 www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1472-6963-11-38.pdf
- Iles R, Eley D, Hegney D, Patterson E, Young J, Del Mar C, Synott R, Schffhams P. *Revenue effects of practice nurse-led care for chronic diseases*. Australian Health Review. 2014 Dec 22. Accessed April 2015 www.publish.csiro.au/nid/271/issue/7057.htm
- King J, Corter A, Brewerton R, Watts I 2012, *Nurse practitioners in primary care: benefits for your practice*, Australian General Practice Network June 2012 Accessed April 2015 www.apna.asn.au/lib/pdf/Resources/AMLAresources/20121004_rsc_NP-Bus-case-web-version.pdf

The impact of nurses on quality and safety in general practice

There is emerging evidence that as part of a primary health care team, general practice nurses can improve quality and safety in general practice. The nurse role is well suited to implementing quality and safety systems embedded in accreditation processes. The Australian Primary Care Collaboratives Program is delivering an evidence base regarding the positive impacts that a quality and safety approach can have to managing chronic conditions in primary health care settings. Further research on the success of these approaches includes:

- Phillips C, Hall S. *Nurses and the wise organisation: techne and phronesis in Australian general practice*. Nursing Inquiry. 2013;20(2) pp.121–132. Abstract accessed April 2015 onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2012.00601.x/abstract
- Knight A, Caesar C, Ford D, Coughlin A, Frick C. *Improving primary care in Australia through the Australian Primary Care Collaboratives Program: A quality improvement report*. BMJ

Quality and Safety. 2012;21:948-955 doi:10.1136/bmjqs-2011-000165. Accessed April 2014 qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/21/11/948.full.pdf+html?sid=495f3114-f7cc-46f9-a9c5-b1217d093392

The importance of teamwork in general practice

A key issue for general practices is determining the roles of a nurse, and how this can complement the roles of other professionals within the general practice, particularly general practitioners. Given the potential scope of practice of a nurse working in general practice, when determining appropriate activities a range of considerations should be taken into account including the skillset and capacity of the nurse themselves (including generalist and specialist expertise) and the types of roles that will be relevant for the local serviced communities. Other factors to consider include how potential activities will complement the skillsets and interests of general practitioners and what activities are financially viable. In order to bring these considerations together, teamwork and leadership is vital. Research that reflects these issues includes:

- Sibbald B. *Should primary care be nurse led?* 2008. Cited in Walker L, Paterson E, Wong W, Young D. *General Practice Nursing*. NSW. 2010. pp.16-17.
- Helms C, Crookes J, Bailey D. *Financial viability, benefits and challenges of employing a nurse practitioner in general practice*. Australian Health Review. 2014 Dec 22. doi: 10.1071/AH13231. Accessed April 2014 www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view_file&file_id=AH13231.pdf

Workforce development

General practice nursing is a new profession which is evolving. There is evidence to suggest that given the generalist nature of nursing competencies, there are limitations regarding the exposure to primary health care issues provided to nursing undergraduate students. This has implications regarding the level of support required for nurses as they enter the general practice setting. Further research regarding these issues includes:

- Keleher HM, Parker RM, Francis K. *Preparing nurses for primary health care futures: How well do Australian nursing courses perform?* Australian Journal of Primary Health. 2010;16:211-6.

Conclusion

There are significant opportunities to develop the role of general practice nurses and enhance their function in general practice settings. Engaging with the evidence base will provide guidance of ways to optimise the expertise that a nurse can contribute to general practice.