



## **What is a Nurse Practitioner?**

A Nurse Practitioner is a nurse who has earned a Master's or Doctoral degree. They blend clinical expertise in diagnosing and treating patients with an emphasis on disease prevention and health management. NP's bring a comprehensive perspective to patient-centered healthcare.

## **What do NPs do?**

Nurse Practitioners support patients with physical and mental health conditions through comprehensive history taking, physical exams, ordering diagnostic tests, and recommending appropriate medical treatments.

NPs are qualified to diagnose acute and chronic medical problems, advise patients on treatments, prescribe medications, and make referrals for a wide range of health concerns.

## **Is a Nurse Practitioner the same as an MD?**

No. Although they perform very similar services, the backgrounds of NPs and MDs are different as to how they tend to approach the patient. What sets an NP apart from other health care providers is their unique emphasis on the health and well-being of the whole person.

MDs follow a medical model focused on diagnosing and treating diseases, often through specialized procedures. Both NPs and MDs provide comprehensive healthcare services, but MDs typically handle more complex medical cases and surgeries, and their training is significantly longer.

NPs primary focus is supporting patients to take charge of their health, including disease management or prevention, health education, and counseling. They guide

patients to make smart health and lifestyle choices, which in turn can lower patients' out of pocket costs.

## **How are Nurse Practitioners (NPs) different from Physicians Assistants (PAs)?**

While NPs and PAS often appear to perform similar functions, there are important distinctions between these health care professionals.

Nurse Practitioners start out as Registered Nurses before pursuing advanced education and training to become an NP. Nurse Practitioner programs provide specialized education in a variety of clinical areas, including in-depth training in a particular specialty. Once in practice, NPs may treat patients independently or in collaboration with a physician.

Some Physician Assistants come to their education with a background in health care, but it is not a requirement. Rather than focusing on a specialty patient population, the PA certification process introduces the individual to the healthcare system and provides general education about the variety of skills needed for the PA to manage different types of patients. PAs work under the supervision of a physician.

## **Do NPs work under an MD?**

In Washington State, NP's are able to practice independently. However, at WWMG, they do work in close communication with our physician colleagues on complex patient cases.

## **Can NP's prescribe medication?**

Yes. In Washington State, NP's have full prescriptive authority just as an MD would.

Watch our video, [What is a Nurse Practitioner?](#)