

FAQ about Nurse Practitioners

- **What is a Nurse Practitioner?**

- A nurse practitioner is a Master's or Doctoral level prepared nurse that blend clinical expertise in diagnosing and treating health conditions with an added emphasis on disease prevention and health management. NP's bring a comprehensive perspective to health care.

- **What do they do?**

- Nurse Practitioners manage acute and chronic medical conditions (both physical and mental) through comprehensive history taking, physical exam, and the ordering of diagnostic tests and medical treatments. NPs are qualified to diagnose medical problems, order treatments, prescribe medications, and make referrals for a wide range of acute and chronic medical conditions

- **Is an NP the same as an MD?**

- No. Although they perform very similar services, their backgrounds are different as is 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. With a focus on health promotion, disease prevention, health education, and counseling, NP's guide patients in making smarter 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.
- 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 includes education that introduces the provider to the health care 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.
- Nurse practitioners have initial training and licensure as a registered nurse before pursuing advanced education and training. Nurse practitioner programs provide specialized education in a variety of clinical areas, providing in-depth education about a particular specialty. NPs may treat patients independently or in collaboration with a physician.

- **Do they work under an MD?**

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

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

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