

Existing data does not support the VHA's proposal

In September 2014, the VA published an evidence brief entitled, "The Quality of Care Provided by Advanced Practice Nurses."¹³ The authors of this evidence synthesis found "scarce long-term evidence to justify" the position that "a large body of evidence shows that APRNs working independently provide the same quality of care as medical doctors."¹⁴ The authors conclude that "strong conclusions or policy changes relating to the extension of autonomous APRN practice cannot be based solely on the evidence reviewed [in the brief.]" While the VHA cites this brief in supporting documents for the Proposed Rule, the evidence brief's conclusions do not support the VHA's proposal.

The VHA brief finds that APRNs deliver high quality care with a focus on protocol-driven care, thereby ensuring that physicians on the team can focus on more complex patients which uniquely require their expertise. However, it does not follow that APRNs should practice independently. The authors acknowledge as such, noting that studies that "do not explicitly define that autonomy of the nurses, compare non-autonomous nurses with physicians, or evaluate nurse-direct protocol-driven care for patients with specific conditions" are often used to support claims regarding the care independent APRNs provide compared to physicians.¹⁵

The evidence brief also found insufficient evidence to draw conclusions on APRN effect on quality of life and hospitalizations. The authors concluded that insufficient evidence exists to support "strong conclusions or policy changes relating to extension of autonomous APRN practice."¹⁶

Patients want and expect physician-led health care teams

Research shows patients value and rely upon the additional education and training that physicians receive and they want a physician in the decision-making process.¹⁷ Patients understand the benefits of team-based care delivery which is why, according to a 2012 survey, patients overwhelmingly want a physician leading the health care team. Key findings include:

- 91 percent of respondents said that a physician's years of education and training are vital to optimal patient care, especially in the event of a complication or medical emergency.
- 86 percent of respondents said that patients with one or more chronic conditions benefit when a physician leads the primary health care team.
- 4 out of 5 patients prefer a physician to have primary responsibility for leading and coordinating their health care.
- 78 percent of respondents agreed that nurse practitioners should not be allowed to run their own medical practices without physician involvement.

¹³ McCleery E, Christensen V, Peterson K, Humphrey L, Helfand M. Evidence Brief: The Quality of Care Provided by Advanced Practice Nurses. VA-ESP Project #09-199; 2014.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 1.

¹⁵ *Id.* The authors also found insufficient information on whether the quality of care provided by APRNs varies by the practice setting or degree of autonomy.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 19.

¹⁷ Cite AMA PLT study.