The Doctor Nurse Practitioner: Revolutionizing Health Care

As our current health care systems suffers with fewer primary care physicians, poor access to primary care, and rising health care costs, a new kind of doctor-nurse has emerged and is positioned to play an essential role in health care and health care reform.

In 2001, the Institute of Medicine challenged all health care educational institutions to reform their programs to enhance patient care quality and safety. The new vision of education focused on a commitment to patient-centered care, information systems, and quality improvement, emphasizing practices that are evidenced-based and interdisciplinary.

In response, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing proposed the new Doctorate in Nursing Practice (DNP). The new DNP degree provides nurse practitioners with a foundation in finance, health policy, informational technology, and evidenced-based practice in addition to a core clinical residency. The DNP nurse practitioner will achieve the skills necessary to work within our complex health care system with the ability to synthesize the massive amount of original research literature and determine if appropriate to translate into a clinical practice setting to facilitate and enhance quality patient care and safety.

The Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science at the University of San Diego, along with more than 90 other nursing schools, have expanded their programs to include the new clinical doctorate. The DNP nurse practitioner will be able to care for patients and appraise and redesign systems to streamline the delivery of primary care. Nurse practitioners prepared at the doctoral level will be equipped with strong organizational, clinical, economic, and leadership skills that are patient-centered and fiscally sound and can significantly impact the health care reform agenda.
For most nurse practitioners, the new doctorate is a validation of the practice they have been performing for years. Nurse practitioners emphasize health prevention and promotion of healthy life styles and behaviors to reduce risk of diseases. Nurse practitioners have been providing care to acute and chronically ill patients, ordering diagnostic tests, diagnosing illness, and prescribing medications for a long time. Doctor-nurse practitioners now extend that role further by positioning for leadership roles in health policy and in health care organizations to advocate for patient-centered health care systems focusing on disease prevention and health promotion strategies.

*U.S. News & World Report* ranks nursing as the most ethical and honest profession at an overwhelming 84 percent. With a severe shortage of primary care physicians, as most new graduates from medical school are gravitating toward more lucrative specialties, our health care system must draw on these highly educated nurses to fill the void to allow access to care for the acute and chronically ill, the uninsured, and the unprivileged. Most nurse practitioners, about 85 percent, work in primary care settings.

The profession has been mentioned by President Barack Obama as having a part in his health care reform plan. Studies consistently show high levels of patient satisfaction along with quality health care from a nurse practitioner, at a much lower cost. As health care systems become more complex, who better to navigate you through the disease management and prevention process than your local doctor-nurse practitioner?

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