

Response to The Washington Post.

On behalf of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), we read with interest the June 20 article: "Primary-Care Doctor Shortage May Undermine Reform Efforts" by Ashley Halsey III. It addresses the primary care provider shortage looming in America. Although the article references nurse practitioners (NPs) in two instances, the scope of NP-delivered healthcare is never defined, leaving the reader with the impression that physicians are the only providers of primary care and that the only solution to the primary care shortage is to increase the number of primary care physicians. The article fails to mention the expert care provided by NPs nor that NPs provide high-quality, cost-effective, comprehensive, and personalized primary care. NPs are a solution to the primary care provider shortage today and in the future - and a very significant solution.

NPs are ideal primary care providers for persons of all ages. For over 40 years, research has established that NPs provide high quality and cost effective health care, with excellent outcomes. According to the February 2008, *U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report: "Primary Care Professionals: Recent Supply, Trends, Projections and Valuation of Service,"* NPs are the fastest growing discipline of primary care providers in the United States. In fact the number of primary care NPs is increasing at a rate of 9.44% per capita, compared to 1.17% per capita for physicians.

A number of recent reports in prestigious medical and health care publications provide evidence of excellent outcomes associated with NP practice, including *JAMA* (2000), *Medical Care and Research* (2004), *Medical Decision Making* (2006), *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* (2006), *Medical Care* (2004). Cost savings associated with NP practice; include lower rates of hospitalizations, lower unnecessary laboratory utilization and fewer emergency room visits.

NPs are licensed independent practitioners who practice in ambulatory, acute and long term care settings as primary care providers. In addition to diagnosing and managing acute and chronic illnesses, NPs emphasize health promotion and disease prevention. They practice autonomously and in collaboration with other health care providers. Entry level preparation is at the graduate level. The autonomous nature of the NP's advanced clinical practice requires accountability for health care outcomes. Clearly, increased utilization of this health care professional would lead to better access, improved outcomes and overall lower health care costs.

NPs are well established as high quality primary care providers. There are over 125,000 of these clinicians practicing in the United States, the majority of whom are practicing in primary care. Approximately 6000 NPs graduate from their educational programs each year. With proper funding this number could be increased substantially to assist in meeting the primary care needs of the public. Better awareness of the value of NPs and increased access to their valuable services will go a long way in solving the primary care provider shortage.

AANP, the oldest and largest national professional membership organization for NPs of all specialties, was created in 1985 to provide NPs with a unified way to network and to advocate for NP issues across all specialties at the local, state, and national levels. Since its inception, AANP has continually served as a major resource for NPs, their patients and other healthcare consumers, to promote excellence in practice, education and research; to provide legislative leadership to advance health policy; to establish healthcare standards and to advocate for access to high-quality, cost-effective and personalized healthcare.

We appreciate having the opportunity to respond to your article and hope that you will assist in disseminating this information to the public as well. AANP has extensive and comprehensive research data regarding NPs and their practice and we would welcome the opportunity to work with you as a resource in the future.

Sincerely,

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