

Nurse practitioners play a key role

# The changing face of health care

By Lindsey Cole  
The Oshawa Express

Nurse Practitioners may not be considered doctors, but they are making huge strides when it comes to the type of care they can give.

For Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario President Michelle Acorn, it is a privilege to be part of a patient's life - to be able to provide care to patients of all ages, focusing on preventing disease along with promoting good health.

Now, she says, it is also a privilege to be able to add several other services to the list of qualifications for Ontario Nurse Practitioners (NPs).

As of October 1, NPs will be able to prescribe more medications for patients as well as provide more services that they previously could not.

According to the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, the Colleges of Nurses of Ontario, which regulates NPs, has approved an amendment to the Nursing Act made by Bill 179, giving NPs more say when it comes to looking after their patients.

"With the exception of controlled substances, NPs will have the authority to prescribe medication as appropriate for client care," the website reads.

"NPs will be able to dispense, sell and compound medication in specified circumstances (for example, when the client does not

have reasonable access to a pharmacy)."

Acorn, who has worked at Lakeridge Health for 22 years, says this is a huge step for health care in the city as well as the province.

"We're able to communicate a diagnosis. As of Oct. 1 we are able to broadly prescribe," she says. "We have the knowledge and skill to do it...Broad prescribing will significantly enable NP contributions to patient care, improve access to care, improve timely and responsive treatment."

Along with being able to prescribe more medication, NPs will also be able to set and cast fractures in specified circumstances, give client care orders to registered nurses and registered practical nurses for procedures that they couldn't before. This news is on top of a recent announcement that will allow NPs to admit and discharge hospital patients.

With more than 1,300 members of the association and 1,800 NPs in Ontario, Acorn says health care is changing for the better in the province.

But, she says, many people still do not know the role of an NP and how they help patients daily.

"NPs are here for your health. We are partners in your care. We are clinicians, leaders, educators and researchers," she says.

Working as part of a health care team, NPs can diagnose and treat illness and/or injuries, perform physical check-ups, order

and interpret diagnostic tests, write prescriptions, provide counseling and education, provide supportive care through illness, provide treatments and/or procedures, and make referrals to family physicians, specialists and other health professionals.

The idea is to provide a holistic approach, Acorn adds.

"We spend time with you to listen to your concerns. We work with doctors and other health care professionals," the website states, adding NPs are registered nurses with advanced university education who work in a variety of settings including hospitals and community-based clinics in cities and smaller towns in Ontario.

"We work in partnership with physicians, nurses and other health care professionals such as social workers, midwives, mental health professionals and pharmacists."

Currently, there are 26 NP-led clinics in the province, one of which is in Oshawa, located with the Canadian Mental Health Association's Durham Branch.

"We're proven to be safe and effective," Acorn adds. "People love the care of a Nurse Practitioner. We are educated in research and leadership. It's about improving access to care."

Funding for these clinics is provided by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and NPs are paid a salary for their services.

For Acorn, the services NPs provide only continue to grow, showing that health care can be given in many ways.

"(The) practice scope continues to be enabled with hospital discharge and admission coming," she says. "It's certainly the way of the future. We're a great investment."

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Ontario students are proving they have what it takes to succeed, says the provincial government.

Recent results from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) show that 69 per cent of Grade 3 and 6 students are mastering reading, writing and math skills.

These skills will lead to success in high school, postsecondary education, training and the workforce and represents a 15 per cent

increase since 2003, the province states in a release.

The EQAO is an arm's-length agency of the provincial government that has administered provincial assessments annually since 1996. Since 2003 the province says it has helped students succeed by reducing class sizes, increasing support for teachers and launching the full-day kindergarten program.

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