



Photo: Courtesy APNA

A snapshot of general practice nurses in Australia

Who are General Practice Nurses?

General practice nurses are qualified registered or enrolled nurses who deliver primary health care in a general practice setting. The environment in which they work is often unpredictable and involves caring for people from diverse backgrounds and at all stages of life.

The General Practice Nurse Role

The general practice nurse plays a pivotal role in health promotion, health maintenance and prevention of illness by providing care, information and education to individuals and the community.

While the role of the general practice nurse varies according to the type of patients they see and the general practice setting in which they work, the general practice nurse works in both a clinical and managerial capacity. This means these nurses must work collaboratively with others, both within the practice and in the broader community.

General practice nursing is a growing area of clinical practice in Australia. A combination of factors including a greater focus on health promotion and chronic disease management, general practitioner workforce shortages and an ageing population have seen the role of general practice nurses expand and develop.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in 2008 there were 10,194 nurses employed in general practice with around 60% of general practices employing at least one general practice nurse.

The role of nurses in general practice includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Clinical nursing services:

- triage and patient assessment
- clinical patient care, e.g. wound care
- diagnostic services
- clinical data management.

Health promotion and chronic disease management

- health screening
- immunisation
- health check reminders, e.g. pap smear reminders
- patient education
- outreach services, e.g. visiting elderly patients unable to visit practice
- acute and chronic disease management, e.g. diabetes and asthma management

Coordinating patient services:

- working with GPs to plan and manage patient care
- liaising with allied health and community care services
- coordinating delivery of health care services
- ensuring continuity of care
- facilitating effective communication between patients and health care providers
- patient advocacy.



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Promoting patient, carer and community well being:

- providing education and health information
- delivering specific programs
- engaging in community development
- educating about self care.

Managing clinical standards and legislative requirements:

- infection control and sterilisation
- monitoring incidence of infectious disease
- records management
- occupational health and safety
- participating in accreditation processes
- maintaining medical supplies.

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Management of human and material resources:

- optimising the use of professional resources
- building the practice base
- building practice capacity to adapt to change
- maximising financial efficiency.

As regulated health professionals, registered nurses are responsible and accountable for their own practice and as such are not 'supervised', nor do they provide care 'for and on behalf of' any other health care professional. Nurses provide care in collaboration with general practitioners and other health care providers, focusing on positive outcomes for all people.

Where enrolled nurses work in general practice they must be supervised, directly or indirectly by a registered nurse.

General practice nurses should not be confused with nurse practitioners. 'Nurse Practitioner' is a title protected by state and territory nursing legislation.

See also: [A Snapshot of Nurse Practitioners](#).

Sources

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