



Oregon Center for
N U R S I N G

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Oregon Center for Nursing Report Finds Critical Lack of Nurse Practitioners in Primary Care

MARCH 4, 2020, PORTLAND, ORE.—The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN), the state’s leading organization on nursing workforce issues, today officially released the results of new research involving nurse practitioners (NPs) in Oregon. The results underscore the need for policy makers and health leaders to urgently address a looming shortage of primary care practitioners (physicians and nurses) throughout the state, not just in rural areas. For patients, this potentially means increased wait times and reduced access to medical professionals who can meet basic health care needs, including wellness and prevention of illness.

Oregon licensure laws allow NPs to perform all aspects of primary care, but according to the new report, only 25% of NPs are actually providing primary care in the state. The rest of the more than 3,000 NPs in the state are in specialty clinics, emergency rooms, hospitals or other settings not considered primary care.

“Many nurse practitioners are educated and qualified to provide the comprehensive primary care that Oregonians deserve, but there are impediments to that happening,” says OCN’s Executive Director Jana Bitton. “Before Oregon’s policy makers start relying on nurse practitioners to fill the primary care gap, there are issues that must be addressed and questions that need to be answered.” Though there is anecdotal evidence about reasons practitioners are avoiding primary care (i.e., adequate reimbursements, hospital privileges, and competitive pay), Bitton feels more research must be done about the motivations and barriers practitioners face.

According to the OCN, incentives to be considered may include loan repayment programs or housing allowances that encourage NPs to pursue or remain in a primary care setting. “Unless there is a focused effort to incentivize NPs to bring their skills and talents to primary care settings throughout the state, patients and communities are at risk of being underserved in years to come,” says Bitton. “It’s not good enough to just count the number of nurse practitioners in a specific location. Examining the number of licensed or practicing NPs within a particular area may grossly overstate the capacity for primary care. It’s clear the proportion of NPs providing primary care is declining over time.”

ABOUT OREGON CENTER FOR NURSING

OCN is a nonprofit organization created by nursing leaders in 2002. OCN facilitates research and collaboration for Oregon's nursing workforce to support informed, well-prepared, diverse and exceptional nursing professionals. Recognized by the Oregon state legislature as a state advisory for nursing workforce issues, OCN fulfills its mission through nurse workforce research, building partnerships, and promoting nursing and healthcare. For more information about OCN, please visit www.oregoncenterfornursing.org.

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