March 3, 2015

Duke Study shows Advanced Practice Nurses offer Affordable Solution to Physician Shortage

RALEIGH – A new study shows that North Carolina’s impending primary care shortage can be alleviated while reducing costs, and adding jobs and tax revenue to the economy. The suggested fix: simply allowing Advance Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) to practice to the full extent of the training and education they have already.

Christopher J. Conover, PhD, a Research Scholar at Duke University’s Center for Health Policy & Inequalities Research, released his findings in a study entitled Economic Benefits of Less Restrictive Regulation of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses in North Carolina. The study looks specifically at North Carolina’s regulations and compares them with the overwhelmingly positive outcomes in states that have already updated the ways that APRNs are regulated.

“Modernizing APRN regulations has the potential to positively impact health care access, quality, and cost,” Conover said. “It is rare that any policy change offers gains across all three major dimensions of the North Carolina health system’s performance.”

Conover’s conservative estimates conclude that expanding the use of APRNs would save North Carolina more than $430 million in health care costs – with the potential to save up to $4.3 billion – while adding at least 3,800 jobs to the economy by the end of the decade.

APRNs are some of the most highly-trained nurses in the profession, and require masters-level education. The four types of APRNs include:

- Nurse Practitioners
- Certified Nurse-Midwives
- Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists
- Clinical Nurse Specialists

Currently, most APRNs in North Carolina are forced to sign agreements with supervising physicians in order to practice. These contracts can often be costly and do not require the physician to actually oversee patient care.

“This limits the ability of those nurses to provide care due to an agreement that is based on two individuals and not necessarily based on the education and training of the nurse,” said North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA) President Megan Williams, MSN, RN, FNP.

Opponents to this type of regulatory reform have often suggested that APRN care is somehow less safe than physician care. This latest study directly refutes that assertion. By looking at outcome studies in states that have already modernized APRN regulation,
Conover found that: “while these studies vary greatly in methodological rigor, each has concluded that APRN practice outcomes are equivalent or better than those of physicians.”

Multiple studies have shown that North Carolina has an impending gap in primary care, with increased demand that will be exacerbated by a shrinking supply of physicians. Conover suggests updating regulations could allow APRNs to greatly help alleviate that shortage.

“These are encouraging results,” said NCNA CEO Tina Gordon, MPA, CAE, FACHE. “This study backs up what we already know to be true in other states with evidence-based research that actually quantifies the potential advantages specific to North Carolina.”


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**ABOUT NCNA**
Since 1902, the North Carolina Nurses Association has been the voice for North Carolina’s registered nurses. Formed by a group of nurses, the first objective of NCNA was the pursuit of the Nursing Practice Act, making North Carolina the first state in the nation to legalize the registration of nurses. Members of the North Carolina Nurses Association continue to be recognized nationally for having a significant impact on the profession and for advancing quality care in a variety of practice settings! NCNA leads the charge in the quest to keep North Carolina nurses on the cutting edge of nursing policy, education, practice and more. NCNA is proud to be the only nursing association in the state that represents all of North Carolina’s Registered Nurses. We encourage you to become a part of professional nursing by joining NCNA!

**OUR MISSION**
The North Carolina Nurses Association serves the changing needs of its members, addresses nursing issues, and advocates for the health and well-being of all people.