

# Nurse Practitioners help meet health needs

## Working together for quality health delivery

By Kimberly Ballance, AMM Senior Policy Analyst

The term “Nurse Practitioner” (NP) has been in use for nearly 50 years, however increased interest in NPs to supplement health care delivery in Manitoba has led to a resurgence in interest in this medical profession. A Nurse Practitioner is a Registered Nurse (RN) who has additional training in health assessment, diagnosis and management. In Manitoba, legislation requires Nurse Practitioners to have both an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree with a nurse practitioner major. Currently, in Manitoba, there are approximately 50 practicing NPs.

The use of NPs in the Canadian health field can be seen as early as the 1960s, resulting from a number of factors including physician shortages, specialization, and the changing role of nurses in practice. Although the role of nurses was changing in practice, and was recognized by educators, there was minimal movement to formalize the role of NPs through legislation and regulation. Through the 1970s, many academic institutions began to tailor programs to these changing roles, however the role of NPs was highly dependant upon collaboration with and supervision by physicians, particularly in urban settings.

In the 1980s, a vast majority of NP initiatives disappeared. This was due to a perceived abundance of physicians, inadequate income levels, lack of legislation/regulation, low public awareness and poor support from public, policy-makers and other health professionals. In the 1990s a renewal of the health care system and amplified focus on efficient primary care led to an improved interest in the role of NPs. This increased awareness was pursued through formal legislation; regulation, including a defined scope of practice; and education for NPs.

Manitoba’s *Registered Nurses Act* was proclaimed in 2001 as new legislation and the *Extended Practice Regulation* came into force in June of 2005. This allowed RNs who met the requirements set out in the Extended Practice Regulation to have the authority to:

- Assess and diagnose client health/illness status
- Order and receive results of screening and diagnostic tests
- Prescribe drugs
- Perform minor surgical and invasive procedures.


RNs who registered on the extended practice register were then able to use the Registered Nurse (Extended Practice) designation. In order to harmonize terminology across Canada this will soon become the Nurse Practitioner (NP) designation.

NPs provide a range of health services with a target of promoting health and preventing illness. NPs work in collaboration with other health professionals such as physicians, RNs, pharmacists, nutritionists, social workers and therapists to ensure that patients receive the most complete and coordinated health care. NPs are increasingly recognized as a solution for alleviating current gaps and decreasing wait times in health delivery, particularly in rural and remote communities.

In rural settings NPs often manage the daily health needs within communities while the family physician rotates through a number of communities on a regular, but intermittent, basis. This coordination of medical professionals has been supported by the College of Family Physicians of Canada in its paper, *Primary Care and Family Medicine in Canada: A Prescription for Renewal in Canada (2000)*. Coordinated teams of medical professionals are seen as a quality model to deal with the health of communities in terms of increased access, quality of life and disease prevention. Although these models are operational and working well, there are not enough of them. The success of multidisciplinary teams in rural and remote communities demonstrates the potential of utilizing the full scope of skills represented by NPs and other professionals to meet the health needs of municipalities. The role of NPs in Manitoba is still evolving but there are numerous examples of positive collaborations between medical professionals and success stories for communities. An ongoing awareness of the role that all professionals play in the health care delivery system is vital in the creation of community health delivery models and subsequently, overall community health.

Sources: Canadian Nurses Association, *The Registered Nurses Act and Extended Practice Regulation*, College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, University of Manitoba’s Manitoba Nursing Research Institute

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# Profile of a Nurse Practitioner

Following the completion of her undergraduate nursing degree, Christy worked in adult acute, home care, pediatric acute and intensive care, primary care, northern nursing and as a nursing instructor. After working for a number of years in these areas, Christy wanted to have more responsibility for the health of her patients. With her love of nursing, a Masters in Nursing was a perfect fit. She graduated in 2006 from the U. of M. and began working as a Nurse Practitioner in the emergency room at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach.

As the only NP employed by the south-east region RHA, Christy was challenged to develop collaborative relationships with fellow medical, nursing and allied health professionals. Christy and her colleagues developed a *Collaborative Practice Agreement*, a document outlining the role of NPs, and demonstrating a model of collaboration with patients, doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other therapists. The Collaborative Practice Agreement assisted in the education of staff on the scope of practice for NPs and aided in creating a positive work environment.

Christy's day-to-day role consists of seeing patients in the emergency room and attending to their health needs. Health promotion, disease prevention and education are part of the care she gives her patients. Currently the NP position in the Steinbach emergency room is part of a two-year pilot project.



**Name:** Christy Seniuk  
**Education:** Undergraduate and Masters degrees from the University of Manitoba  
**Employer:** South Eastman Health/Sante Sud-Est Inc.  
**Salary:** \$34/hour (based on a 0.8 schedule or approximately 31 hours/week)

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