How Many Patients Can a Nurse Practitioner See in a Day?

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Authors and Disclosures

Posted: 09/22/2010

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Question

Is there a limit on the number of patients a nurse practitioner can see in a primary care setting in an 8-hour work day?

Response from Carolyn Buppert, NP, JD Attorney, Law Office of Carolyn Buppert, PC, Bethesda, Maryland

Three issues must be addressed:

• How many patients can a nurse practitioner (NP) see safely?
• How many patients is it logistically possible to see in 8 hours, given the practice's physical plant and operational set-up, the patient acuity, the ability of the patients to communicate, and the ability of patients to move on their own?
• How many patients does an NP need to see to keep the practice financially sound?

Only the NP and his or her supervisor can determine the answer to the first 2 questions. I can answer the third question. Generally, an NP needs to see 20 patients a day to generate enough money to make a practice profitable. However, that number depends on the fee schedule, the NP’s salary and benefits, the practice’s overhead expenses, and the practice’s expectation of profit. The math goes like this:

• 20 patients x 5 days/week x 47 weeks per year = 4700 patients per year.
• If the average charge per patient is $45, $45 x 4700 = $211,500 generated per year.
• If the NP's salary and benefits = $100,000 ($80,000 plus $20,000 for employer taxes and benefits) and overhead expenses = $80,000 (rent on space, electronic medical record, assistants, telephone, supplies, equipment, electricity, malpractice insurance, etc.), then profit is $31,500.

Some practices will be happy with $31,500 in profit, and some will want more. However, 20 patients per 8-hour work day is considered to be a reasonable expectation for primary care.

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