

Case Report

Scope, Myths and Misunderstandings of Medical Doctors Regarding the Advanced Nurse Practitioners: A Case Report

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Abstract

The revision of the Pakistan Nursing and Midwives Council Act in 2023 marked a significant turning point by granting nurses with an MS Nursing degree the autonomy to practice independently. This transformative step, however, triggered a contentious debate within the medical community, particularly among doctors. This case report delves into the intricate web of myths and misunderstandings that encircle the scope of practice of Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) in Pakistan. Through an evidence-based analysis, this report aims to unravel the origins of these misconceptions and provide insights that might lead to collaborative and informed policymaking.

Introduction

The revision of the Pakistan Nursing and Midwives Council Act was hailed as a progressive leap toward strengthening healthcare delivery. Nevertheless, the announcement encountered resistance from the medical community, predominantly doctors, who expressed concerns about the implications of this revision. One of the focal points of contention is the scope of practice of ANPs, whose expanding role is still met with skepticism and misunderstandings. Revision of the Pakistan Nursing and Midwives Council Act in 2023, granting MS Nursing degree holders the opportunity for independent practice, sparked a significant response from the medical community.

This reaction manifested as a letter addressed to the PMDC (Pakistan Medical and Dental Council), expressing concerns about the potential implications of nurses gaining independent practice privileges. Doctors, advocating their position, highlighted the existing shortage of nurses in Pakistan's healthcare system. They argued that granting independent practice to nurses might exacerbate the scarcity of healthcare professionals, potentially compromising patient care quality and safety. An analysis of this case report reveals several critical aspects.

Firstly, the Act's revision acknowledges the evolving role of nurses in healthcare, aligning with global trends where advanced practice nurses take on more responsibilities to meet growing healthcare demands. Doctors' concerns warrant consideration as well. Nurse shortages can indeed impact healthcare delivery. However, a balanced perspective is essential. The introduction of independent practice for nurses doesn't necessarily entail complete isolation from physician collaboration.

Collaborative models could be designed to ensure teamwork while utilizing nurses' skills effectively. Comparative analysis with global practices highlights the variability in nurse practitioners' roles. Countries like the United States have long recognized nurse practitioners as essential healthcare providers, working both independently and collaboratively. Such models underscore the importance of proper training, regulation, and inter-professional collaboration.

Myths and Misunderstandings

One prevailing myth is rooted in the misconception that enabling ANPs to practice independently would exacerbate the scarcity of nurses. However, literature [5] illustrates that ANPs can not only alleviate the burden on doctors but also serve as a bridge to expanding healthcare access. By engaging ANPs in primary care and routine healthcare services, doctors can be more available to address complex medical cases, thus optimizing resource allocation.

The Nurse Shortage Myth: The argument that ANPs would contribute to the shortage of nurses dismisses their specialized training and capacity to provide comprehensive care. Contrary to this perception, studies [1] from various settings have shown that ANPs enhance healthcare access without depleting the nursing workforce. Their presence can address the diverse healthcare needs of a population while also enhancing the quality of care provided.

Role of Advanced Nurse Practitioners: The role of ANPs extends far beyond routine care. They are equipped with ad-

vanced clinical skills and training [7] that enable them to diagnose, treat, and manage a wide range of health conditions. ANPs are adept at conducting physical examinations, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests, prescribing medications, and developing comprehensive treatment plans. These capabilities allow ANPs to provide holistic and patient-centered care, contributing to better health outcomes.

Global Experiences: International experiences [3,4] shed light on the successful integration of ANPs in healthcare systems. For instance, Canada's adoption of ANPs as Most Responsible Providers in specialized mental health settings showcases the potential benefits of collaborative practice. In Australia, ANPs specializing in nephrology have proven to be valuable assets in delivering specialized care, ultimately improving patient satisfaction.

Collaborative Practice: The misconception that ANPs are a threat to doctors is challenged by their role in collaborative practice. Research [2] underscores that ANPs contribute to a harmonious healthcare ecosystem. The experience of advanced practice nurses in cancer care demonstrates high job satisfaction, emphasizing the collaborative synergy achieved when ANPs and doctors work together in concert.

Suggestions and Future Recommendations

Scope of Practice and Professional Autonomy: The scope of practice for healthcare professionals, including nurses and doctors, can be a complex and sensitive issue. In many countries, the scope of practice for nurses has been expanding due to advances in medical knowledge and the need for more efficient healthcare delivery. Allowing nurses with advanced degrees to practice more independently could enhance patient care, especially in cases where doctors are in short supply.

Inter-professional Collaboration: Collaboration between healthcare professionals is crucial for delivering comprehensive and effective care to patients. Doctors and nurses each have their unique roles and expertise. Finding the right balance between their respective roles is essential for ensuring patient safety and quality of care.

Shortage of Healthcare Professionals: Shortages of healthcare professionals, including both doctors and nurses, can have serious implications for the healthcare system. Addressing these shortages often involves policy changes, investments in education and training, and improved working conditions to attract and retain professionals. Patient Safety and Quality of Care: Any changes to healthcare regulations should prioritize patient safety and quality of care. Ensuring that healthcare professionals, regardless of their roles, are well-trained and capable of providing safe and effective care is paramount.

Evidence and Research: Decisions about healthcare policy changes should ideally be based on evidence and research. Evaluating the potential impact of allowing nurses with advanced degrees to practice independently would involve considering factors such as patient outcomes, healthcare access, and the overall healthcare system's functioning. Stakeholder Engagement: In any significant change to healthcare regulations, it's important to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including

doctors, nurses, regulatory bodies, policymakers, and patient advocacy groups. This helps ensure that decisions are well-informed and take into account diverse perspectives. To address the myths and misunderstandings surrounding the scope of practice of ANPs in Pakistan, several steps can be taken.

Firstly, fostering open communication channels between doctors and nurses through seminars, workshops, and forums can facilitate understanding. Secondly, establishing interdisciplinary training programs that highlight the strengths and contributions of both professions could bridge the knowledge gap. Thirdly, developing guidelines for collaborative practice, where ANPs and doctors work in tandem, could enhance patient care quality. Lastly, continuous professional education for both doctors and ANPs can ensure that they stay updated on each other's roles and advancements in healthcare.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the myths and misunderstandings held by some medical doctors regarding the scope of practice of ANPs in Pakistan are not supported by empirical evidence and international experiences. ANPs hold the potential to enhance healthcare access, improve patient outcomes, and foster collaborative practice. The contention over the nurse shortage myth can be assuaged by acknowledging ANPs' specialized skills and pivotal role in addressing healthcare challenges. By embracing these evidence-based insights and acting on suggestions, policymakers, medical doctors, and nursing professionals can collaboratively navigate the path toward a comprehensive and effective healthcare system that meets the needs of all citizens.

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