The Rising Trend of Nonphysician Provider Utilization in Healthcare

A follow-up to the MGMA 2014 Research & Analysis Report

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Contents

What’s in a Name? ................................................................. 3

Supply and Demand: The Continued Upward Growth of Nonphysician Provider Utilization in Healthcare .................. 4

Nonphysician Provider Services: A Guide to Independent vs. Incident-to Services ............................................. 5
What is Incident-to Billing and is it Worth it? ................................................................. 9

Nonphysician Provider Utilization: Cost and Revenue ........... 10

Nonphysician Provider Compensation ........................................ 12

Nonphysician Provider Utilization: Rules, Regulations and Guidance Who Are the Players? ................................................................. 13
One Size Does Not Fit All ................................................................. 14

Nonphysician Provider Utilization and The Future Of Healthcare ................................................................. 16
What’s in a Name?

PAs and NPs have been grouped together as NPPs under general terms such as “advanced clinician,” “advanced practice provider” and “midlevel.” These labels have been widely accepted yet seem inappropriate not only to the professional but also to the patients whom they serve. The term “midlevel” calls to mind “middle of the road” or “mid-range,” which is not the type of care patients expect from their providers.

A physician assistant is a nationally certified and state-licensed medical professional — not a “middle-of-the-road” provider. PAs practice medicine on healthcare teams with physicians and other providers. They practice and prescribe medication in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the majority of the U.S. territories and the uniformed services.2

Nurse practitioners are independently licensed healthcare professionals who possess a master’s or doctorate degree. They diagnose and treat medical conditions by prescribing medication, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests, and performing invasive procedures.3

Saying “Today you will be seeing our nurse practitioner or our physician assistant” is sure to give the patient more confidence in your NPP than, “Today you’ll be seeing one of our midlevels.”

NPP — A nonphysician provider is a specially trained and licensed individual who can provide medical care and billable services. NPPs include nurse practitioners, physician assistants, certified nurse midwives and other healthcare providers. This report will focus on the nurse practitioner (NP) and the physician assistant (PA) as NPPs.

The role of the NPP took hold in the 1960s as a direct response to a shortage of physicians in the United States. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projects a shortage of 20,400 physicians by 2020; the integration of NPPs into the healthcare system could reduce this shortage to about 6,400.1

There’s no doubt about it: Nonphysician providers (NPPs) are firmly seated at the table for quality healthcare.
Supply and Demand: The Continued Upward Growth of Nonphysician Provider Utilization in Healthcare

Evidence continues to show that medical practices across the United States are increasing their use of NPPs.

**Total Nonphysician Providers per FTE Physician**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: MGMA DataDive Pro Cost and Revenue 2016</th>
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<td><strong>Five year trend</strong></td>
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NPPs continue to enjoy a very optimistic job market; **as the need for more providers increases, so do employment opportunities.** Statistics from the Bureau of Labor show that in 2015:

- 170,400 nurse practitioners (NPs) earned a median salary of $104,740. That is a **14.5% salary increase since 2012**, which means the NP field is increasing at a rate of 31% — much faster than the 7% average job growth rate across all fields. New York, California, Florida, Texas and Ohio have the highest NP employment levels.⁴

- 94,400 physician assistants (PAs) earned a median salary of $98,180. That is a **7.9% increase in salary since 2012**. The PA field is growing at a rate of 30% — again, much faster than the average growth rate across all fields. New York, California, Texas, Pennsylvania and Florida have the highest PA employment levels.⁵

**With more and more practices utilizing NPPs, the challenge of finding these skilled professionals also increases.** AMN Healthcare, which specializes in recruiting permanent physicians and NPPs, states that the **year-over-year growth in NPP search requests is roughly 160%**. That’s far higher than the 10% to 20% increase in requests for other healthcare positions.⁶

**The NPP forecast is a bright one** — not only for these professionals themselves but also for the practices that utilize them and the patients who receive their care.

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⁴ "PAs will continue to play a major role in the delivery of health care for the foreseeable future. In collaboration with our physician colleagues and other health care professionals we will solve the health care delivery challenge facing our nation."

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