

Frequently Asked Questions about APNs and Autonomous Practice

What is an APN?

An APN is an advanced practice nurse. They are registered nurses with advanced education and training beyond a bachelor's degree. Most have a master's degree and more and more have or are obtaining a doctoral degree. This category of nurses includes: nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, nurse anesthetists and clinical nurse specialists.

What is autonomous practice?

Currently in the State of Nevada, advanced practice nurses who prescribe medications and diagnosis and treat illnesses must have a written collaborative agreement with a physician. This has created difficulties across the state for both patients and advanced practice nurses. By removing this mandate through legislative changes, advanced practice nurses will be able to provide care (within their scope of practice) according to their knowledge, skills and expertise and seek collaboration with other members of the health care team as needed. 24 other states have autonomous practice for their APNs.

You say the current regulations have created barriers for both patients and advanced practice nurses. What are those barriers, specifically?

APNs across the state have shared with us the unintended consequences of this written collaborative agreement mandate such as: 1) impossibility or extreme difficulty in finding a physician who will sign a collaborative agreement, particularly in Nevada's underserved areas; 2) immediate disruption in primary care provider services when the physician with whom an APN has a written collaborative agreement leaves the practice; and 3) requirements of payment for a physician to enter into and maintain a collaborative agreement with an APN. All of these result in limiting Nevadans' access to safe, quality and affordable care and places unnecessary barriers for APNs to practice within their scope according to their education, skills and expertise.

What happens if the APN encounters a patient issue they are not prepared to handle if they don't have a collaborating physician?

APNs have the education and expertise to identify situations where they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to handle issues outside their scope of practice. They will continue to collaborate and refer patients to health care providers who do have those needed skills and knowledge. They do not need a written collaborative agreement to take this action.

Well, this all sounds very reasonable. What can I do?

As this issue becomes more publicized, patients, community members, other members of the health care community and legislators may look to a nurse they know and trust for information. You have taken the most important step... Learning more about the issue! Talk about this issue to your friends and family. Contact your legislator and let them know you support this effort and would like their support too!