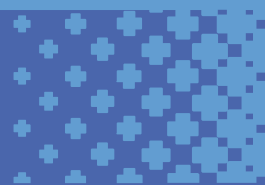


Role of Nurse Practitioners in Emergency Medical Services

An AAENP Position Statement

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BACKGROUND & ROLE OF THE NP IN EMS

Over the past decade, Nurse Practitioners (NPs) have been increasingly integrated into the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system.¹ Leveraging the unique and holistic education provided to all nurses, combined with the graduate-level preparation and experience of the NP, uniquely positions the EMS NP to provide and direct patient care within a multidisciplinary EMS system. The specific roles fulfilled by the EMS NP are determined by state nursing and EMS regulatory agencies and needs, in conjunction with the education, licensing, certification, credentialing, and privileging of the individual NP.

TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS

In the United States, EMS systems across the country vary in their use of physicians or other advanced practice providers to fulfill many, or all, of the advanced practice roles discussed in this document.^{1,2,3} In the absence of a nationally standardized EMS NP program, it is prudent that EMS NPs meet, at minimum, the standards and qualifications set out for emergency NPs^{4,5} and any additional specific education necessary to properly function in their specific EMS environment(s).

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) are uniquely positioned to provide and direct care of the patient within a multidisciplinary EMS system. The AAENP supports utilization of NPs in EMS to the full extent of their licensure, education, and scope of practice based on state and agency regulations.

A variety of tasks and roles, congruent with their education and scope of practice, may be appropriately fulfilled by NPs in EMS including response to 911 requests, interfacility transport, medical support at events or large-scale incidents, mobile integrated healthcare (MIH), and population safety and wellness initiatives. Current EMS NP practice in the United States includes, but is not limited to, a variety of tasks and roles identified here.

DIRECT PATIENT CARE

For EMS NPs providing direct patient care, the EMS NP should be recognized as a level of EMS provider within the state EMS system, capable of providing care commensurate with their education, licensing, certification, credentialing, and privileging.

EMERGENT AND URGENT CARE.

The diagnostic, therapeutic, and prescriptive abilities of the EMS NP provide unique opportunities for direct patient care across a wide array of acuities. In the 911 setting, this may include treating on site in lieu of transporting,⁶ evaluation and triage to non-emergency department destinations,⁷ and/or advanced interventions beyond the paramedic scope of practice while on-scene or en route to the hospital. With an increasing acuity of patients and regionalization of specialty healthcare resources, the EMS NP is positioned to provide a high level of critical care support during interfacility transport of complex patients or those at high risk of deterioration.⁸ EMS NPs may have authority to deviate from standing protocols under their own license without contacting medical control to more efficiently individualize care.^{8,9}

MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE.

Mobile integrated healthcare (MIH) programs provide in-home management of patients with chronic or complex health problems and facilitate the transition of hospitalized patients back to their home by addressing social, environmental, and healthcare challenges. EMS NPs in a MIH program have an opportunity to evaluate and treat patients in their home, lead and coordinate transitional care of medically complex patients, and serve as resources to community paramedics or other MIH clinicians.¹⁰

POPULATION SAFETY & WELLNESS.

The role EMS plays in the greater public health system¹¹ and the need for APRN involvement in population health represents an opportunity to enhance public health through immunization campaigns,^{12, 13} comprehensive outreach to underserved populations,¹⁴ or other community health initiatives.¹⁵

ADMINISTRATION & DIRECTION

Advanced education in healthcare delivery systems positions EMS NPs to provide administrative support, both clinically and operationally, in conjunction with the EMS Medical Director. These administrative roles may include agency directors, educators, and/or liaisons with outside healthcare agencies and organizations. Administrative activities can occur prospectively, concurrently with patient care, and/or retrospectively.

PROSPECTIVE ACTIVITIES.

EMS NPs are prepared to lead the development and maintenance of evidence-based patient care guidelines and protocols for EMS systems based on their graduate educational preparation including scientific inquiry processes to drive clinical practice changes. EMS NPs may also develop and participate in the didactic and clinical on-boarding of new employees and function as an educator and resource for ongoing employee training, education, and competency evaluations.

CONCURRENT ACTIVITIES.

In addition to their role in providing patient care, EMS NPs should be authorized to provide online or on-scene medical control to treating EMS clinicians, as allowed by their state scope of practice, and EMS regulations should allow EMS providers to accept medical control orders from EMS NPs. EMS NPs may also fill leadership roles within the formalized incident command structure at large-scale incidents. For systems providing critical care interfacility transfers, EMS NPs can be utilized in a triage capacity to proactively identify the appropriate level of care and specialty resources that must be dispatched to meet the patient's needs in transport.⁸

RETROSPECTIVE ACTIVITIES.

As expert clinicians, EMS NPs can be a valuable resource to case reviews and documentation audits. EMS NPs may also assist with quality assurance and quality improvement programs at the service level or on a broader multidisciplinary scale including regional EMS systems, trauma systems, or similar.

EMS RESEARCH

EMS NPs, especially those with doctoral preparation, may serve as the principal investigator, co-investigators, or site coordinators of original research projects within their EMS system or as a part of multi-agency collaboration. EMS NPs are also suited to facilitate the translation of available research into practice and can be used to lead evidence-based quality improvement projects.

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