FAST FACTS FOR THE NEW NURSE PRACTITIONER

What You Really Need to Know in a Nutshell
About the Author

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In 1965, Dr. Loretta Ford, a registered nurse (RN), and Dr. Henry Silva, a physician, proposed the nurse practitioner (NP) as another provider model, and its evolution continues. Practices affecting issues of educational preparation, licensure, autonomy, certification, scope of practice, prescriptive authority, and reimbursement still vary among states. Efforts to standardize these practices proceed, so that the maximum benefits of the NP provider to the healthcare system can be fully realized. When Dr. Aktan invited me to write the foreword for her book, I wondered how much reference to these ongoing efforts would actually help the reader. As I read each section, however, it became clear that such discussions benefit all readers.

This book teaches you about becoming an NP, as well as invites you to consider topics of importance to NP students and engaged NPs. Aktan presents information that will help any nursing student or professional RN considering an NP career to engage in sound decision making. The reader learns quickly what is really involved in the NP role. There is thoughtful emphasis on the benefits of spending time in examining
the “fit” among one’s finances, learning style, nonnegotiable life roles, and the demands that accompany preparing for this new career. And the reader will acquire some very practical tips on how to maximize learning from the preceptor-student practice experiences that are part of all programs.

Both prospective and established practitioners will benefit from attention to the challenges and rewards that accompany the reality of practice. Because the examples derive from real practice, Atkan’s commentary and reflections have a direct, genuine, and practical quality. Her inclusion of possible scenarios portraying intra- and interprofessional dynamics offers a guide to successfully managing these evolving relationships. And, her discussion of achieving comfort with the changing responsibilities inherent in this provider role offers valuable insight to NP students, as well as existing practitioners.

The last two sections focus on a selected range of topics and issues of importance to NPs, including questions about why reimbursement schedules for the same patient service can vary by health plan depending on whether the provider is an NP or a physician; commentary on the contribution of NPs to health care and the future impact to be realized from this provider group; and a reasoned discussion of the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) recommendation as the required educational credential for nurse practitioner licensure as of 2015.

This book is well organized, purposeful, and highly readable. It guides the reader through essential material that will contribute to informed decisions. Aktan’s easy and personable style makes the reading enjoyable, and her dual perspective
of practicing NP and nurse educator create its credibility. I thank her for the opportunity to share my appreciation of her contribution to those who will benefit from her work.

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My vision for this book was to create something I wish had been available when I became a new Nurse Practitioner (NP). I love being an NP, and I take pride in my discipline. I hope that this contribution to the field will encourage more nurses to consider becoming NPs and that it will also help the next generation of NPs transition more effectively into the role.

The book provides the reader with a wealth of information to support you through this journey. It is based on fact and guided by opinion. Yet, overall, its intention is to promote self-reflection, as many of the choices you will make during this process are entirely personal.

This book fills a void for students and newly certified NPs alike, serving as a “guide” or a “manual” in that it incorporates the author’s experiences as a Family Nurse Practitioner and Nurse Educator. No such other book exists. Until now, all of the information that a student NP or new NP would need was available only in many different places—not in one reputable and convenient source. This is the resource that any nurse considering becoming an NP needs, and any student or new NP must have.
Recent literature on the history of the NP role is explored and explained, but this is not a traditional textbook! Humor and real-life clinical examples are included. Useful tips and resources, such as professional organizations, networks, associations, and Web sites, are shared with the reader. Most importantly, the reader is provided with insight from experts in the field in a “What You Really Need to Know” format.

The NP is a “hot topic” in today’s ever-changing, ever-challenging, and economically driven healthcare system. Newer nurses, in much greater numbers, are being encouraged to enroll in nursing graduate programs sooner than they ever were before to fulfill this increasing need. This will continue to skyrocket because of current and future healthcare demands and the economic benefits NPs offer.

Although we have been around for decades, only recently has the NP’s role become an essential component in meeting society’s healthcare demands. Currently, there is a heated debate over the master’s-prepared NP as compared with those who complete the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. This issue, which has been presented in the nursing literature as well as in well-known sources, such as the New York Times, is also analyzed.

This book explores reasons to become an NP, provides insight on issues related to NP education, clarifies hot topics related to NP practice, and proposes how the role of the NP is and will continue to evolve. This is the “all-in-one” reference for potential or current NP students and newly practicing NPs. Its chapters contain learning objectives, check lists to facilitate important decision making, charts/tables with “hot topics” or key elements, and testimonials from currently prac-
ticing NPs, as well as the author’s own poignant moments as a new and experienced NP that will be helpful to any new or soon-to-be-new practitioner! Significant points are bolded throughout and pertinent information is summarized in boxes that offer “Fast facts in a nutshell.”
I sat down to write this book for two reasons—to create something I wish had been available to me as a new NP and to give back to a profession that has given so much to me. As healthcare professionals, we have the ability to heal. We have the ability to help. We have the ability to empower others and make a difference each and every day. This book is for my present and future NP colleagues. I hope that this resource will help you through the bureaucracy of the healthcare system, so that you can focus all of your effort on your patients. After all, is this not what it is all about?

I want to acknowledge my many teachers, preceptors, mentors, colleagues, and friends in the discipline of nursing. Thank you to my precious Delila and Jett for inspiring me to strive to do better each and every day, to my husband, Mukbil, for your love and support and for being my best friend, to my mother, Barbara, for shaping me into the woman I am today, and to my incredible supportive family and wonderful friends for all you do for me.
Part I

Making the Decision
Chapter 1

Why Become a Nurse Practitioner?

INTRODUCTION

You are a registered nurse (RN), who is considering attending graduate school to become a nurse practitioner (NP). Maybe you have worked closely with one of these nurse experts. Possibly, you are just ready for a change—or even a challenge!

This chapter discusses the role of the NP, why you might want to pursue such a career, and what steps are necessary to achieve this goal. It explains the different degrees available, such as the Master’s prepared NP and the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Finally, it explores the current and future role of the NP, the job market, and the many benefits the job offers.

In this chapter, you will learn:

1. An overview of the role of the NP.
2. The reasons to become an NP.
3. Recommendations on how to pursue this career path.
THE ROLE OF THE NP

The current role of the NP is to provide expert nursing care. In addition, an NP often adopts a medical approach to patient care, as NPs have the authority to assess, diagnose, and treat patients in a variety of settings.

What are NPs allowed to do? This varies from state to state. In general, most NPs function as the primary healthcare providers for their clients. Nurse Practitioners can order tests, prescribe medications, and refer patients to specialty providers. They manage their own patients and follow-up as necessary. If a patient requires care above and beyond an NP’s scope of practice, the NP refers them to a physician colleague. For additional information about the role of the NP, see Chapters 13 and 27.

Fast facts in a nutshell

- NPs provide expert nursing care.
- NPs also function as the primary healthcare providers for their patients.

REASONS TO BECOME A NURSE PRACTITIONER

I chose to become an NP for many reasons—personal and professional growth, a greater sense of autonomy, higher salary potential, and increased job satisfaction. In addition, there was my response to a question that made my skin crawl: “You
are so smart, why didn’t you just become a doctor?” I am sure many, if not most, of you reading this book, have been asked this question. My response is simple: “Because I love being a nurse.” Nurses have the unusual ability to combine medical knowledge with a holistic approach to patient care.

Although many NPs function in a role that is, at times, similar to that of physicians, we do so differently because we look at our patients differently. Nursing is our art, and NPs take nursing care to the next level.

Why are you becoming an NP? Whether your reasons are the same as mine or are your own, deciding to make the change is the first step. You must then discover the steps necessary to achieve this goal.

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<td>Some reasons to become an NP are professional growth, autonomy, an increase in salary, and greater job satisfaction.</td>
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**THE FIRST STEP**

The first step in deciding to pursue a graduate degree is to do your research. Ask NPs what they like and dislike about the NP role. Consider your interests—both now and in the future.

Review the job market in your area. From local listings, you will likely discover positions available in a practice or institution near you. Familiarize yourself with the potential salary
ranges ($68,624–$95,157 annually) and the other benefits the position will offer (see Chapter 18). Although the job market varies from region to region, there is a strong national demand for NPs.

Explore the differences between the Master’s prepared NP and those who have earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. Understand how NPs differ from other types of advanced practice nurses (APNs)—the clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse midwife, and certified registered nurse anesthetist. The DNP, the most advanced degree for nursing practice, will be described in greater detail in Chapter 27.

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Fast facts in a nutshell

The first steps in considering becoming an NP:

- Talk to some NPs.
- Review the job market in your area.
- Learn the differences between the Master’s prepared NP and those who have earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree.

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Many of you may ask about the differences between an NP and a Physician’s Assistant (PA). The answer is simple: prior experience and education. An NP has previous nursing experience as an RN. Therefore, NPs share basic nursing knowledge and skills; they are experts in the art of caring and the science of medicine. On the other hand, a PA may or may not
have previous healthcare experience or education in healthcare science.

Still, in many practice sites, the roles performed by the NP and the PA can seem similar—even, at times, identical, depending on what needs to be done! The actual scope of practice for the NP and the PA, however, differs state by state.

Fast facts in a nutshell: summary

As you consider a career as an NP, keep in mind this excerpt written by a former nursing student who is now studying to become an NP: At one point in my nursing school career I considered leaving the field of nursing and heading to medical school because I was not sure of the scope and the ability of the NP. After working with NPs in the field, I realized that I could do everything I wanted to as a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP). I do not want it to sound like I settled for becoming an NP—far from it. I just realized that the FNP role would fit me better than the MD role.
INTRODUCTION

A variety of nurse practitioner (NP) specialty areas are available for certification. Selecting the correct one for you may be easy or may pose some challenges. This chapter guides you through the first step in this journey. First, it is essential that you understand the various types of NP specialties available. Then, you should follow some recommended guidelines in deciding which is right for you. Good ways to begin include incorporating your nursing background and experiences, spending time with experts in the field, and reflecting on future career goals.

In this chapter, you will learn:

1. The types of NP specialties offered.
2. How to decide which is best for you.
NURSING PRACTITIONER SPECIALTIES

New or potential NPs may consider a variety of areas for certification, including acute care, adult, family, geriatric, pediatric, psychiatric, women’s health, neonatal, and advanced diabetes management. Here, your educational background and nursing experience can play an important role in selecting your specialty. For instance, what population(s) have you worked with as a nurse? Which did you most (or least) enjoy? Has there been any area(s) of nursing that you always dreamed of working in? Newer nurses may also consider their student clinical rotations to help answer some of these questions.

My own experience provides an example of how you can begin to select an NP specialty. My hospital-based nursing experience was primarily in pediatrics in a large, urban medical center. Early on, I knew hospital nursing was not quite right for me. After gaining acute care experience, I found a better fit. I moved out of the hospital into the field of Maternal-Child Community Health Nursing. Here, I also did some work in Pediatric Hospice, where I participated in the development and implementation of a Pediatric Hospice program.

When I decided to pursue my master’s degree, I initially considered becoming a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (PNP). However, community health nursing was such a powerful experience for me. I also had great interest in women’s health. I was faced with the decision to choose a specific population to work with or to select a broader area of certification.

I was not certain that I wanted to commit to just one NP specialty. This is why family practice was an appealing option for me. For an additional six credits and 100 or so clinical hours, I could legally practice in providing care for individuals
in all age groups. I felt this would be the best fit, as it would incorporate my areas of interest at that time, while leaving the door open for others in the future.

Fast facts in a nutshell

Some areas for certification include acute care, adult, family, geriatric, pediatric, psychiatric, women’s health, neonatal, and advanced diabetes management.

WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

I made the right choice for me. With more than ten years experience in family practice, I have managed the acute and chronic health care needs of patients ranging from newborns to persons older than 100 years. I learn something new each and every day that I practice. That is what makes my clinical work exciting for me. Every day is different. Every day is a challenge. Every day is an adventure!

However, I do not recommend this approach for everyone. Some of you have a special ability to work with newborns for example, or the elderly. This is your passion. I do not recommend choosing a broader specialty when you know deep inside exactly where your calling is. I believe that the decision to pursue a new avenue in your nursing career is so personal that you really need to reflect on your experiences as well as your career goals as you choose.
I recommend spending time with practitioners in the specialty areas you are considering. I take nursing students with me into my NP practice for observational experiences all the time. I have never had one end the day without a newly discovered passion to go on to graduate school.

Fast facts in a nutshell: summary

In deciding on an NP specialty area, you need to reflect on your past nursing experiences, as well as your future career goals.