Fast Facts
for the NEW
NURSE
PRACTITIONER

Second Edition

What You Really Need to Know in a Nutshell

Nadine M. Aktan


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FAST FACTS FOR THE
NEW NURSE PRACTITIONER
Nadine M. Aktan, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, received her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in nursing from Rutgers University College of Nursing and Graduate School in New Brunswick and Newark, New Jersey. She is currently chairperson and associate professor at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey, teaching future nurses and nurse practitioners. She also practices as a family nurse practitioner at the Immedicenter, an urgent care/family practice with locations in Clifton, Bloomfield, and Totowa, New Jersey, and as a maternal–child community health nurse for Valley Home Care in Paramus, New Jersey.
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What You Really Need to Know in a Nutshell

Second Edition

Nadine M. Aktan, PhD, RN, FNP-BC

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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 health care system can be fully realized. When Dr. Nadine 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 and invites you to consider topics of importance to both NP students and engaged NPs. Aktan presents information that will help any nursing student or professional RN considering an NP career 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. Also, 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. Dr. Aktan’s easy and personable style makes the reading enjoyable, and her dual perspective of practicing NP and nurse educator enhances its value. 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 second edition of 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 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 NP 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. The second edition includes five new chapters and many updates throughout.

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

Although NPs have been around for decades, only recently has our role become an essential component in meeting society’s health care demands. 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 continuing to evolve. This is the all-in-one reference for potential or current NP students as well as newly practicing NPs. Its chapters contain learning objectives, checklists to facilitate important decision making, charts and tables highlighting hot topics or key elements, and testimonials from currently practicing 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 set in boldface type throughout, and pertinent information is summarized in boxes that offer “Fast Facts in a Nutshell.”

Nadine M. Aktan
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 health care 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 health care system, so that you can focus all of your efforts on your patients. After all, is that not what it is all about?

I want to acknowledge my many teachers, preceptors, mentors, colleagues, students, 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.
Making the Decision
Why Become a Nurse Practitioner?

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 NURSE PRACTITIONER

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 health care providers for their clients. NPs can order tests, prescribe medications, and refer patients to specialty providers. They manage their own patients and follow up as necessary. If patients require 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 Chapter 13.

**FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL**

- NPs provide expert nursing care.
- NPs function as the primary health care 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.
51. WHY BECOME A NURSE PRACTITIONER?

Some reasons to become an NP are professional growth, autonomy, an increase in salary, and greater job satisfaction.

FAST FACTS in a NUTSHELL

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 job posting sites, you will likely discover positions available in a practice or institution near you. Familiarize yourself with the potential salary ranges that have been reported, from $64,100 to $120,500 annually (U.S. News & World Report, “Nurse Practitioner: Salary,” n.d.), and the other benefits the position will offer (see Chapter 18). Although the job market varies from region to region, there is an overall strong national demand for NPs.

Explore the differences between master’s-prepared NPs 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 30.

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 the doctor of nursing practice (DNP).
1. WHY BECOME A NURSE PRACTITIONER?

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 health care experience or education in health care 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**

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.