

Roles of the General Practice Nurse

The role of nurses in General Practice includes, but is not limited to, the following elements of work³:

Providing clinical nursing services in the general practice context through:

- Triage
- Assessment (including health assessments of people over 75 years)
- Therapeutic care and treatment
- Wound care
- Diagnostic services
- Clinical data management

Coordinating patient services through:

- Networking with allied services
- Integrating service delivery
- Sustaining continuity of care
- Planning and management of care (working with GPs in care planning activities)
- Providing information and feedback between the services, patients and GP's
- Patient advocacy

Managing the clinical environment by assisting general practice to meet relevant standards and legislative requirements in:

- Infection control and sterilisation
- Cold chain monitoring
- Records management
- Occupational health and safety
- Accreditation processes
- Maintenance of medical supplies

Promoting patient carer and community well being through:

- Health information
- Education
- Specific programs
- Community development
- Self care

Sustaining general practice by contributing to better management of human and material resources through:

- Optimising the use of professional resources
- Building the practice base
- Building practice capacity to adapt to change
- Maximising financial efficiency

Improving health outcomes by contributing to and enhancing the management and prevention of ill health through:

- Health screening
- Immunisation
- Register and recalls
- Patient education
- Outreach services

- Systems management
- Acute and chronic disease management

³ Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA). 2001. Fact Sheet No. 1, Nurses in General Practice: Roles.



What does a Practice Nurse do?

A typical working day for registered nurse Karen Ruskin, Bulli Medical Practice.

I have been a registered nurse for 27 years, and have been the practice nurse at Bulli Medical Practice for the last eleven years. Prior to this I was employed in the public hospital system and the private sector.

Bulli Medical Practice is a comprehensive family practice in a quiet middle class area with a large population of elderly patients. The practice principles are Dr's Julie Blaze and Jeff Hall.

In July last year we moved to renovated premises located next door to the original surgery. We are a fully computerised completely paperless practice including ECGs and Spirometry. The original building is now a pathology collection centre, which is very convenient for our patients.

I am the only practice nurse at the surgery, and my work hours are 8.30am-2.30pm Mondays, and 9.00am-4.00pm Wednesday and Fridays. At present we have plans to employ another practice nurse to work the remaining two days as the role of the practice nurse is expanding.

All patient care is delivered in consultation with a GP, and the practice has two full time GPs, two part time GPs and one GP registrar. There are also two reception/office staff and one practice manager.

The doctors at Bulli Medical Practice have special interests in mens/womens health, EPC, shared antenatal care, sports medicine, sexual health and mental health. We are a travel medicine clinic and are accredited to give the Yellow Fever vaccine.

I have seen many changes in general practice over the last eleven years. Changes include management of wound care, an increase in the number of vaccines now available, accreditation in general practice, computerisation, an increase in the number of practice nurses, and establishment of a Practice Nurse Network by the IDGP offering great educational opportunities.

I find practice nursing to be extremely rewarding and you form long lasting relationships with your patients and their families. These days there is an emphasis on preventative health care and patient education in which the practice nurse plays a major role. My working relationship with the practice staff is positive, and I feel I am respected for my knowledge, nursing skills and patient care.

Karen Ruskin (RN)*

9.00	1 st Cold chain temp check Check and record both vaccine fridge temperatures
9.00 - 11.30	General clinical procedures include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triage of unwell or injured patients • Wound care: Assessment of new wounds Reassessment and redressing of previous wounds • Immunisation – childhood and adult including immunisation for travellers (under GP instruction) • ECGs • Spirometry • Assisting with minor procedures, such as removal of lesions, insertion and removal of hormonal implants, excision of ingrown toenails, suturing of wounds etc. • Removal of sutures or surgical clips and staples • Pre employment or progress medicals • Ear syringing
11.30 - 12.30	GP Management plans if time allows
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch
13.00 - 14.00	Health assessment for over 75's
14.00 - 16.00	Administration tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return any phone calls, liase with hospitals, community nurse, ACAT etc. • Immunisation recalls • Updating ACIR data • Ensure travel vaccines are logged and paid for Clinical management tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sterilisation of instruments • 2nd Cold chain temp check • Restocking and ordering of medical supplies/equipment and vaccines Change practice linen and ensure infectious waste/sharps is appropriately disposed of.
16.00	Home!

* Permission obtained from practice team to include in resource.

Nurse utilisation within the general practice setting

The previous example of a 'typical' practice nurse's day will not necessarily apply to other practices. It is simply an example of how one practice in the northern suburbs utilises their practice nurse.

The way in which a practice utilises nursing services is unique depending on a variety of factors, some of which include:

- Size of the practice - large medical centre versus smaller practice
- Patient demographics - older patients versus younger patient base, rates of chronic diseases etc.
- Physical layout of the practice - room for a treatment room versus small consult room only
- Qualifications of nurse – registered nurse with no post graduate qualifications in specialty area v's registered nurse with a postgraduate certificate eg: child and family health or midwifery.

Some practice nurses take on one or more of the following roles mentioned below, roles which are used by the Australian Division of General Practice (ADGP) in the formulation of their business case models (see page 53), demonstrating the way in which nurse utilisation can affect the practice financially.

- The **clinical support role**: involves undertaking of clinical duties with the purpose of liberating GP time. Examples of duties under this role are: wound care, immunisations, electrocardiographs (ECGs), spirometry, administration of medications - nebulisers, injections IM/IV, assisting with minor ops, plastering (back slabs) etc.
- The **administrative / management role**: involves managing clinical systems, recall and reminder systems, stock control, equipment maintenance, infection control, sterilisation and accreditation
- The **EPC / PIP role**: ranges from providing home health assessments to managing the EPC system with patient audit and recruitment, recall registers, diabetic and asthma registers, and providing patient education.
- The **advanced primary care role**: may involve the practice nurse running 'clinics' for conditions such as: weight loss, women's health, incontinence, diabetes, asthma, antenatal care and well baby checks. Nurses working at this level are required to have post graduate qualifications in the area of specialty.

Practice Nurse Task List

This is a comprehensive list of tasks that nurses could potentially perform, however the tasks will depend on the practice, and the interests and skills of the nurse and the GP. It would not be expected that all nurses could do all tasks, it is simply listing tasks that a practice nurse may do if they possess the skills and qualifications or are given the training. The IDGP can assist your nurse in developing the skills to perform a number of these tasks.

Immunisation

- Administers vaccines according to NH&MRC schedule *
- Maintains patients immunisation records
- Completes ACIR recording requirements
- Checks monthly ACIR statements to follow-up incomplete payments
- Follows up GPII020A report quarterly
- Orders vaccines
- Maintains vaccine fridge according to NH&MRC recommendations
- Completes daily vaccine fridge monitoring
- Maintains vaccine recall system for children under 7 yrs of age
- Maintains 65 yr old flu and pneumococcal vaccine recall system
- Completes annual flu acquittal form
- Maintains practice immunisation rate above 90%

* Registered Nurses who have undertaken the NSW College of Nursing Immunisation Course for Registered Nurses and are '*Authorised Nurse Immunisers*' are able to administer vaccines as per the NSW Immunisation Schedule without a doctor being present⁴. An MBS nurse item number is claimable for immunisation services provided by a nurse (see page 37).

Health Assessments

- Maintains over 75 years recall system
- Undertakes information collection component of health assessment
- Documents health assessments on computer or as determined
- Arranges GP appointment with patient to complete health assessment
- Ensures Medicare Health Assessment item number claimed

Care Planning

- Identifies appropriate patient/s
- Maintains a recall system for GP Management Plans (GPMPs) and Team Care Arrangements (TCAs)
- Participates in preparation of GPMPs and TCAs
- Fulfils role as a "counted member" of the GPMP/TCA where appropriate
- Ensures Medicare GPMP/TCA item numbers claimed

⁴. NSW Health Circular No. 2002/7, Authority for Registered Nurses to Provide Immunisation Services, 2002.

Diabetes Annual Cycle of Care

- Complies database of all diabetics
- Ensures each diabetic patient record has annual cycle of care documentation
- Maintains diabetic recall system
- Transfers diabetic pathology results to recall list
- Undertakes diabetic education as deemed appropriate
- Undertakes diabetic foot assessments
- Ensures patient has a full eye examination at least every 2 yrs
- Undertakes blood pressure, height, weight and calculates BMI
- Undertakes BSL's as when appropriate
- Takes bloods for Hb A1c, cholesterol, triglycerides & HDL monitoring
- Ensures micro albuminuria check attended
- Checks smoking status
- Establishes Diabetic Clinic
- Maintains Diabetic Education Centre (DEC) patient record card
- Refers Diabetic patients when appropriate eg. podiatry services and diabetes centre
- Ensures Medicare Diabetic Cycle of Care item number claimed when completed
- Ensures Practice Diabetes Outcome % rate meets Outcome Payment requirements

Asthma

- Develops practice asthma register
- Investigates and orders resources
- Undertakes spirometry as deemed appropriate
- Develops individual patient asthma action plans in conjunction with GP
- Provides asthma education to patients
- Maintains contractual recall systems for patients undertaking the Asthma 3+ plan
- Encourages self monitoring - demonstrates how to perform peak flow expiratory flow rate & maintains a symptoms / peak flow diary
- Ensures Medicare Asthma 3+ Plan item number claimed when completed

Cervical Screening

- Maintains cervical screening recall register
- Undertakes pap smears, pelvic examinations and breast checks **
- Develops and maintains practice cervical screening pathology follow up register
- Ensures adequate sampling of squamocolumnar junction
- Ensures Medicare Cervical screening item number claimed when completed
- Ensures Practice Cervical Screening Outcome % rate meets outcome Payment requirements

** Nurses need to have undertaken accredited training for cervical screening/well women's screening. Inform your professional indemnity insurer if your practice nurse will be performing cervical screening.

Venipuncture

- Undertakes blood collection as requested by GP
- Develops systems for the collection of blood by pathology service
- Maintains blood collection register
- Follow up blood collection results on a weekly basis

Minor Procedures/Wound Care

- Maintains minor procedures appointment system
- Prepares patient for minor procedure
- Prepares consulting room/s for minor procedures
- Removes sutures when appropriate
- Assesses and attends to wound care

Antenatal Clinic

- Maintains antenatal register
- Maintains birth register
- Investigates and orders resources
- Undertakes urinalysis, weight, BP, foetal hearts, foetal lie & presentation as deemed appropriate ***
- Provides antenatal education ***

*** Appropriate postgraduate qualifications are required in order to undertake this role (eg. Midwifery qualifications).

Accreditation

- Develops protocols and procedures relevant to nursing duties to meet accreditation requirements
- Attends practice clinical meetings
- Is responsible for infection control within the practice
- Maintains appropriate waste disposal and waste collection requirements
- Maintains appropriate sharps disposal and sharps collection requirements
- Provides education to staff re infection control & cleaning requirements

Sterilisation

- Ensures that all used instruments are cleaned according to the RACGP guidelines
- Ensures that the practice has a designated "dirty" basin
- Develops and maintains sterilisation protocol for the practice
- Records all batches of sterilised instruments in a designated "Sterilisation Book" according to RACGP guidelines
- Ensures that the steriliser meets all of the AS 4187 requirements
- Ensures that batch numbers are recorded in patient records
- Arranges annually for the steriliser to be calibrated & validated
- Ensures all sterilised stock is rotated and stored appropriately.
- Orders and replaces protective equipment as required
- Maintains spills kit

General Duties

- Triage patients on arrival to practice
- Maintains and restocks Drs bag as required
- Maintains and rotates medication supplies on a fortnightly basis
- Maintains practice S8 drug register/s
- Gives injections as requested by the GP
- Undertakes ECGs as requested by the GP
- Undertakes urinalysis as requested by the GP
- Restocks medical supplies in consulting rooms
- Removes sutures as appropriate
- Syringe ears as requested by the GP
- Maintains cryotherapy equipment
- Orders nitrous oxide & O2 as required
- Undertakes wound dressings as deemed appropriate
- Completes health summary documents on all new patients and maintains existing records
- Undertakes audiometry as deemed appropriate
- Checks and restocks emergency equipment weekly or after use
- Conducts spirometry testing as requested by GP
- Involved in patient education and referral to other services
- Assists with undertaking of medicals for diving, Centrelink, Workcover as deemed appropriate by the GP
- Undertakes "eye washing" as necessary
- Assists with plastering and removal of plasters



Task List adapted from Hunter Urban Division of General Practice, Practice Nurse Recruitment Pack, 2003.

