



Advanced Practice Providers – Expanding Much-Needed Access to Primary Care

February 27, 2020

According to many sources, the U.S. will experience a significant shortfall of primary care providers over the next decade. This is due to a number of factors, including a medical education system that's not keeping up with demand, large-scale retirement of an aging physician workforce and the increasing medical needs of baby boomers as they reach their mid-60s, mid-70s and beyond (boomers are the second largest living generation).

In Worcester and Sussex counties, we're already noticing a slight decline in primary care providers per 100,000 residents. While the actual number of providers isn't necessarily going down, the overall population is steadily increasing as more and more retirees move to our resort communities.

Atlantic General Hospital and Health System continues to recruit both primary care providers and needed specialists, which are also in short supply, as part of our mission-driven work to improve the health of the communities we serve. Over the past two years, we have added two primary care physicians, an endocrinologist, a rheumatologist, an orthopedic surgeon and a second urologist to our health system.

We are far from finished. We recognize that our efforts must continue as the provider-to-population ratio swings in the wrong direction and our patients encounter frustration with securing timely appointments -- particularly for primary care.

One way we are solving this issue is by attracting talented advanced practice providers to our health system. Advanced practice providers (APPs), a term used to refer to physician assistants and advanced practice nurses, have come to play a critical national role in providing timely access to high-quality care alongside their physician counterparts.

Since August of 2019, 10 new certified registered nurse practitioners and certified physician assistants have joined our team. While the women's health, gastroenterology and urology specialties are represented amongst their ranks, the vast majority of our newest medical staff members fill the role of primary care provider.

If you are in need of a primary care provider, I urge you to visit Atlantic General Hospital's website at www.agh.care to take a look at the providers now available. Don't put off your search until you are sick or injured. Start when you are in good health.

Are you uncertain about whether a nurse practitioner or a physician assistant is right for you? Here is a brief explanation of each.

A nurse practitioner is a provider who has obtained a bachelor's degree in nursing, followed by a two- to four-year program to obtain their nurse practitioner degree. This includes at least 500 hours in clinical rotations in various primary care and/or specialty settings – they can be inpatient and outpatient. Many nurse practitioners go on to earn their doctorate in nursing practice. In 21 states, including Maryland



and Delaware, nurse practitioners can practice medicine independently – meaning, they do not need physician supervision.

A physician assistant must obtain a bachelor's degree, followed by a two-year program that includes hand-on experience during clinical rotations, to receive their physician assistant degree. Physician assistants currently require the supervision of a physician in both Maryland and Delaware.

Both nurse practitioners and physician assistants examine, diagnose and treat patients; both can order and interpret tests and write prescriptions. If you have questions regarding education and experience when making your decision, feel free to ask the providers you are considering. They are more than willing to answer your questions so you can make an educated decision.

*-- Tim Whetstine
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