

POSITION STATEMENT

JULY 2009



NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are registered nurses educated and authorised to function in an advanced and extended clinical role. NPs possess extensive experience in their area of specialty and hold specific qualifications at Masters Degree level. NPs operate within multidisciplinary teams and they are authorised to prescribe from an approved list of scheduled substances, to make direct referrals for patients to other health care professionals, and to order diagnostic investigations. From November 2010 nurse practitioners will be afforded provider rights under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

General Practice Tasmania recognises the valuable contribution that the NP role may make to the health workforce and the health system within Tasmania and supports the role provided that:

- The establishment of NP services and the development of the NP role must be guided by identified areas of patient and health system need;
- The role of a NP is developed as a supplement to, not as a substitute for, care given by other practitioners or health professionals;
- Clinical practice protocols for specialty areas are developed and agreed in collaboration with general practice prior to the implementation of the NP role in that area;
- NPs do not work beyond the context and specialised clinical area of practice for which they are authorised;
- Medication formularies and formulary approval processes for specialty areas are also developed and agreed;
- Patient referral arrangements and clinical care pathways between GPs and NPs are clear and there is effective channels of communication; and
- The cost effectiveness of the NP work is established and monitored.

General practitioners have a degree of concern about the following aspects of the nurse practitioner role:

- The potential for role confusion, particularly from the patient's perspective, regarding the boundaries and clinical responsibility between the general practitioner, nurse practitioner and general practice nurse;
- Professional indemnity arrangements and the possible liability implications arising out of the introduction of the role;
- The processes involved for the NP to order diagnostic tests, prescribe medications and make referrals; and
- The potential for unfunded costs of GP time.

To address these concerns, *General Practice Tasmania* recommends that the State Department of Health and Human Services clearly articulates how the role of NP in Tasmania is intended to be positioned in the context of primary healthcare and ensures that NP role implementation projects are fully evaluated in consultation with all key stakeholders.

The General Practice Tasmania Network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

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The General Practice Tasmania Network has developed position statements on various issues relevant to the operation of the health services system and relating to general practice across the State. These position statements reflect the views of Tasmanian GPs and the primary care community.

Each position statement is based upon research and the analysis of relevant literature as well as an assessment of the broader health sector environment. The position statements are developed collaboratively between the State Based Organisation, the three Divisions of General Practice and the Workforce Support Agency within Tasmania. During the development of each statement the Divisions and Workforce Agency consult with their Tasmanian GP members and Boards respectively. Prior to release the statements are ratified by the Boards of each of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network.

Collaboration with other general practice organisations (eg General Practice Training Tasmania, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, etc) is also a feature in the development of some position statements. The co-endorsement of position statements maximises the effectiveness of these statements and represents a strong collective view.

It is expected that position statements will evolve to reflect the ever-changing health and general practice environment. Accordingly feedback and comment is invited to ensure that the position statements continue to be relevant and accurately reflect the views of the Tasmanian general practice and primary care community.

To provide feedback on any position statement please contact any of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network:



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