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Improving Access to Care through the Integration of the Nurse Practitioner Role in a Saudi Arabian Primary Care Department: A Comparative Study

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Impact Statement

- Research supports the use of the nurse practitioner role to improve access to primary care not only in the United States but in international settings
- Nurse Practitioners can decrease the burden of growing primary care and primary care physician shortage internationally
- Nurse Practitioners are in a key position to improve access primary care through the provision of safe and high-quality care in the walk-in clinic setting

Abstract

Background.

Primary care is essential for any effective healthcare system. Poor patient health outcomes, low patient satisfaction, and increased healthcare expenditures result without access to primary care. Globally primary care departments struggle to meet the needs of growing patient populations coupled with physician shortages, increasing health complexity, and aging populations. Although research clearly demonstrates that nurse practitioners provide safe and high-quality healthcare, the best utilization of their skills to improve access was explored through an integrative review in an international setting. Evidence from the integrative review supports the integration of this role in the walk-in settings to improve access to primary care.

Objective.

Demonstrate the feasibility of improving access to care through the integration of the nurse practitioner into the primary care walk-in setting.

Population and Setting.

This quality improvement project was implemented in an outpatient primary care clinic in Saudi Arabia. Patients who presented to the primary care department without an appointment, aged 18-65 years old and triaged to the walk-in clinic based on established acuity standards, were included in this study. Pediatric and pregnant populations were excluded.

Methods.

This comparison study measured outcomes of a 12-week quality improvement project introducing the role of the nurse practitioner into a Saudi Arabian outpatient department. The project occurred in a busy primary care setting from April 1, 2017 to June 30, 2017. Outcomes measured included patient satisfaction, productivity, healthcare utilization, and quality of care.

Results.

Four outcomes were measured to demonstrate improved access. The introduction of the new role resulted in positive patient satisfaction, comparable productivity and healthcare utilization of NP and physician consultations, and appropriate quality of care measures.

Interpretation and Conclusion.

Research indicates that nurse practitioners provide safe and high quality care. The introduction of the role in a busy primary care clinic in Saudi Arabia demonstrated positive patient satisfaction, high quality care, and comparable productivity and healthcare utilization rates to usual care.

Future implications of these findings include the development and expansion of the nurse practitioner role within the Kingdom to improve access to care.

Keywords: advanced practice nurse, primary care, nurse practitioner, access, appointment, urgent care, walk-in clinic, minor illnesses.