



The GPplus Practice Nurse Initiative
South Australia



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Advanced Practice Nurses:

Connectedness as a unique attribute and the contribution this makes to the development of integrated care in General Practice.

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Research Question

This research effort sought to identify the ‘communicative’ attributes and skills that advanced Practice Nurses impart to a General Practice organisation and which may well contribute to service integration within the broader Primary Health Care sector.



Situation Analysis

- Practice Nursing is an area of the health workforce currently demonstrating considerable growth and development. There is much interest presently in determining the required scope of practice that nurses might demonstrate in the General Practice setting.
- Current research has described Australian Practice Nurses as agents of internal connectivity within the general practice setting.



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A New Theory!

- There is limited local research in Australia of the Practice Nurse role and in particular research describing the emerging Advanced Practice Nurse Role
- As part of the evaluation process of the GP Plus PNI an examination of the contribution the Advanced Practice Nurse role makes to care coordination and integrated care as promoted by the GP Plus was undertaken
- A grounded theory approach was deemed to be an appropriate methodology to explore and propose a new theory.



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Proposition

- My theory deduced from this research effort using a Grounded Theory approach proposed that the advanced Practice Nurse demonstrates a unique and valuable attribute, a 'connectedness attribute'
- This 'connectedness attribute' supports an ability to create patient connectedness, organisational connectedness and external connectedness providing significant momentum to bring about rapid health service reform in this setting, with the potential to improve integration with the broader primary health care sector.



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Methodology

- Utilising the Gp Plus Practice Nurses as research participants provided an opportunity to explore the Advanced Practice nurses in general practice settings that were not hampered by cultural mores that often restrict the nursing role and scope of practice
- The significant success demonstrated by some GP Plus Practice Nurses in undertaking the advanced nursing roles indicated that something different was going on
- I wanted to explore the unique communicative characteristics of this negotiated role that elicited such significant organisational change



Literature Review

- Mills and Fitzgerald (2008) in their study into Practice Nurse roles identified that where nurses contributed to collaborative practice they described the following characteristics that facilitated the role as, “open communication, referral pathways, nurse led clinics, recognition of knowledge and skills”
- Watts, Foley, Hutchinson (2004) also identify delegation of care rather than task delegation as a critical characteristic in collaborative practice.
- Phillips, Pearce, Dawn, Hall, Porritt, Yates, Kljakovic, Sibbald (2008) systematically examined and described the role of the Practice nurse as “agent of connectivity”



Discussion

- These researchers have observed that Practice Nurses act as agents of connectedness between the different disciplines within the practice, subscribe to the unwritten cultural rules in General Practice and broker connectivity that incorporates a broad range of activities.
- Practice Nurses who have been prepared through specific training like the GP Plus PNI, to undertake an advanced role and whose employing organisation is prepared to make the cultural changes to support system changes, can in fact address many of the barriers commonly experienced by Practice Nurses utilising their full scope of practice and referred to in much of the current literature.



Method

- 8 Practice Nurses having participated in the GP Plus PNI agreed to participate in the research process
- The General Practices they were employed by, had all entered into an agreement to appoint an advanced practice nurse in their practices, utilising that nurse to provide a dedicated program of Chronic Disease Management and Care Coordination
- Each Research participant completed a brief survey to ascertain the length of time they had worked in General Practice, to confirm that they had completed the GP Plus training program and predominantly undertook the role commonly associated with advanced Practice Nurse.



- On completion of the survey the participants were then asked to respond to five key questions using in – depth, face to face or telephone interviews.
- The characteristics of data collection in classic grounded theory require that the research seeks out a core variable. The characteristics of a *core variable* will have been identified as “recurring frequently, links various data, has an explanatory function
- By the completion of the third interview transcribing and commencing of coding these initial transcripts, three core concepts began to emerge from the variables and remained prevalent in all eight interviews.



Results

- The 3 key concepts prevalent in each interview transcript were;
- 1. *Patient connectedness*
- 2. *Organisational connectedness*
- 3. *External connectedness*



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Key Concept 1

- Patient connectedness was elucidated through the constant comparative process from the recoded transcript. A frequently occurring variable was the notion of the non static status of the patient - nurse relationship, with words transcribed such as journey, navigate, link. Another reoccurring variable was the notion of inclusivity of the patient nurse relationship, one of parity, with words transcribed such as knowing, owning, share, and trust.



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Research Quotes

- *“I think about it all the time, nursing is probably the only job where people trust you straight out, (others) have to earn that trust but patients just give that to nurses.” Interview 3*
- *I think communicating with your patients is a huge thing, the GP has known these patients for years but they tell me things he has never known about them before and I find that a huge thing. Interview 6 (PN for 9months)*
- *It’s an ongoing relationship (with the Patient), to be able to get on with them time after time. Interview 7*
- *They own you, they see me as their nurse... a dear old Indian lady put her hand on my arm the other day after the procedure and said you see my grand daughter, you see my daughter and now you are mine. Interview 8*



Finding 2

- Organisational connectedness was codified through recurring variable of reciprocity, with words transcribed such as trust, bond, respect, knowing, helping.



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Research Quotes

- *The GP starts to build a trust in you and comes to leave it to you knowing you will do the right thing. Interview 2*
- *The GP would just leave it to me and just trust that I would do it, you have discretion definitely, she (the GP) really used me as a practice nurse should be. Interview 3*
- *I think he does show respect for my knowledge and skills and he shows that by the way he introduces me to his patients. Interview 4*
- *We really rely on each other the receptionist and I, some of the work is interchangeable....we talk about and work together to put systems in place. Interview 7*



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Finding 3

- External connectedness was codified through the recurring variables of environmental scanner, information hunter gatherer, detective, service seeker.



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Research Quotes

- *So much information comes into General Practice... there are lots of the (services) out there and you just need to keep an eye out, I see a flyer and I think that could be good for a patient one day and put it in my resource folder, I don't know anyone that needs a wig at the moment but one day I might and I've got the flyer. Interview 3*
- *You're linking patients with complex health needs into the community to access health care... the patient choices are far greater because a lot of them (patients) are unaware that these opportunities exist for them until they come and speak with us (Practice Nurse). Interview 6*
- *You spend a lot of time researching, ringing around, doing the hunter and gather work. Interview 6*



Conclusions

- What can be ascertained from this small study is that where a strategic appointment of an advanced Practice Nurse is made in General Practice with the specific intent to provide chronic disease management and care coordination services for patients with complex care needs, a significant contribution to integrated care can be achieved
- Advanced Practice Nurses are in fact not simply agents of internal connectivity in General Practice, which implies a system level communication form only but advanced Practice Nurse instead need to be conceptualised as an agent of connectedness, which reflects far more closely the dynamic interplay of the Practice Nurse in action in the General Practice setting.



Conclusion

- The key concepts of patient connectedness, organisational connectedness and external connectedness as identified in this research, and the manner in which advanced Practice Nurse create this connectedness, demonstrates that with sufficient organisational support, combined with effective professional development as per the GP Plus PNI, General Practice could well move quite rapidly toward effective integration with the broader Primary Health Care sector.



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Thankyou