

Letter: Allow nurse practitioners to fill health care gap

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As president of the Virginia Council of Nurse Practitioners, I agree with “Scope of practice laws put patients in the crosshairs” (Aug. 13). The opinion piece correctly addresses that regulatory restrictions preventing nurse practitioners (NPs) from practicing to the full extent of their education and training are making it more difficult for patients to access health care.

For more than 15 years, Virginia’s NPs have been working to bring scope of practice laws in line with other states and increase access to care in the commonwealth. Decades of evidence-based studies prove NPs provide high-quality, safe and cost-effective care. In states where NPs have full practice authority, the findings are the same. In fact, a 2023 systematic review published in Medical Care Research and Review determined full practice authority is associated with lower cost of care, higher numbers of NPs in rural areas, increased access to primary care, increased utilization of health care services, and no decrease in quality of care. All of these factors benefit patients.

Earlier this year, Virginia took a positive step forward by reducing the NP transition to autonomous practice requirement to three years. As part of this legislation, Virginia’s Department of Health Professions will collect data that we expect will further support the important impact NPs have on health care.

It’s no secret the number of practicing physicians is decreasing, especially in rural areas. With more than 88% of NPs prepared in primary care and a rapidly increasing number certified in psychiatric mental health, NPs can help fill these health care workforce shortages by delivering much-needed care to patients.

I’m excited about Virginia’s progress in recognizing the valuable role of NPs and look forward to continuing to collaborate with legislators and our health care colleagues to improve access to care for all Virginians.

Alysia Pack, president, VCNP Board of Directors.

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