

The RACGP's Vision for a Sustainable Health System – APNA submission

17 JUNE 2015

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process on the RACGP's Vision for a Sustainable Health System. We are providing this submission on behalf of our membership group, Australian primary health care nurses.

To inform its submission, APNA asked its Members to complete a survey in which a series of questions were asked about the RACGP's Vision for a Sustainable Health System. The result of respondent feedback is incorporated in the submission below.

APNA Submission

As an overall comment on the RACGP's Vision for a Sustainable Health System, APNA supports the RACGP's position outlined in its Consultation paper in terms of the important role primary health care nurses working in general practice play as members of the general practice team. APNA also supports any new funding model that assists in the recruitment and retention of primary health care nurses.

Specific comments on the recommendations listed in the RACGP's Consultation paper are as follows:

VOLUNTARY PATIENT ENROLMENT

- APNA supports the concept of a patient's 'medical home', with a focus on preventative care and management of chronic illness. It is essential, however, that any medical home model is adequately funded.
- The incidence of chronic disease is rapidly increasing, and any funding model that enables better coordination by a multidisciplinary team of chronic disease management will be of significant benefit to the Australian public.

COMPREHENSIVENESS OF SERVICE

- APNA broadly supports the idea of payments to practices reflecting the comprehensiveness of health services delivered by that practice.
- Primary health care nurses working in general practice contribute to the comprehensiveness and scope of general practice services, particularly in areas such as women's health, chronic disease management and immunisations.

- APNA supports the improvement of after-hours access to general practice services. Primary health care nurses play an important role in the delivery of after-hours care.

HEALTH SERVICE INTEGRATION

- APNA would support any measure that results in improved integration of care across health sectors. APNA acknowledges better integration of care can result in significant cost savings and leads to better overall health outcomes for the community.

PRACTICE NURSING

- APNA strongly supports the statements in the Consultation paper about the benefits that primary health care nurses working in general practice can bring to the community. We wish to query, however, whether the full scope and role of the general practice nurse is encapsulated in the three dot points given as benefits (we would be happy to provide some alternative wording to provide enhanced clarity).
- APNA prefers use of the terms 'general practice nurses' or 'primary health care nurses working in general practice' to 'practice nurses'.
- As outlined in the Consultation paper, general practice nurses have a particularly valuable role within the primary health care team in chronic disease management.
- The Consultation paper recommends direct payments to practices that support the retention of nurses. These support payments already exist in the form of the Practice Nurse Incentive Program (PNIP). It is unclear whether, and if so in what way, the RACGP's proposal differs from the PNIP.

TEACHING

- It is critical that medical students have adequate exposure to the general practice speciality. APNA supports any initiatives aimed at increasing students' exposure to general practice.
- APNA also supports increasing exposure for nursing students to general practice.

IT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- With an ageing Australian population and increasing numbers of people with chronic and complex health conditions, the need for an effective and efficient eHealth system is vitally important.
- APNA strongly supports the continued development of the national eHealth record system (now renamed *myHealth Record*) as part of a safe and effective healthcare system. APNA notes the role and importance of primary health care nurses (as part of the primary health care team) in the widespread adoption, use and integration of the myHealth Record system into contemporary primary health care.
- Improved infrastructure in general practice is critically important to GPs and general practice nurses as it supports the delivery of safe, high quality care across a broad range of services.

QUALITY, SAFETY AND RESEARCH

- APNA supports measures to increase the uptake of quality, safety and research initiatives in general practice.

- APNA acknowledges quality, safety and research initiatives can lead to better patient experiences and better health outcomes.

COMPLEXITY LOADING

- APNA supports funding measures that acknowledge the complexity of health and socioeconomic needs of the practice population, particularly the specific needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients.

INDEXATION

- APNA supports universal access to healthcare via Medicare. As part of this, APNA supports implementing measures (an example being the RACGP's proposal to implement full indexation of MBS patient rebates) aimed at maintaining universality of access.

Finally, APNA's comments about areas of the Consultation paper other than recommendations are as follows:

- The visual models on pages 6 and 8 of the paper do not reference the patient. These models could be improved by including this reference.
- We assume the reference to general practice in the visual model on page 8 of the paper incorporates primary health care nurses working in general practice. We think the model could be improved by more clearly setting out members of the general practice team. In addition, we believe nursing groups outside of general practice should be represented on the visual model.
- APNA would support references being made in the Consultation paper to the multidisciplinary primary health care team which incorporates GPs, nurses and allied health professionals.

About APNA

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care including general practice. APNA provides primary health care nurses with a voice, access to quality continuing professional development, educational resources, support and networking opportunities. APNA strives to increase awareness of the role of the primary health care nurse, and to be a dynamic and vibrant organisation for its members.

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