

SCOPE OF PRACTICE EXPANDS FOR NURSE PRACTITIONERS

"Dr. Thomas A. Bruce, former dean at UAMS told a Policy Foundation forum that prevention and "a team approach" are key to improving medical care access in rural Arkansas." (Policy Foundation research memo, June 11, 2009)

(March 31, 2021) Two measures expanding scope of practice for certified nurse practitioners have been approved by the state General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Asa Hutchinson.

Public Act 412 of 2021 grants full and independent practice authority to certified nurse practitioners. Nurses "would need about three years, or 6,240 hours, of practice under a collaborative agreement with a physician in order to earn the right to practice independently," according to a legislative analysis. They would "have their licenses renewed every three years." The law allows them to "receive and prescribe drugs, medications and therapeutic devices."

The measure was sponsored by state Rep. Lee Johnson, R-Greenwood, a physician. It's legislative intent states the policy goal of providing "a legitimate pathway to full practice authority for certified nurse practitioners."

Public Act 449 changes the definition of "certified registered nurse anesthesia" so these professionals could work "in consultation with" a physician instead of "under" their supervision. The measure states a "certified registered nurse anesthetist may select, obtain, and administer Schedule II drugs only during the perioperative, periobstetrical, and medical procedure period."

Policy Goal: Expanded Supply

Supporters contend the measures will help expand medical supply in rural areas, an issue explored at a 2009 Policy Foundation forum. Dr. Bruce, a Mountain Home native explained the factors that lead physicians to serve rural markets. He supported a medical team concept "larger than four to five doctors." Dr. Bruce, in response to a question from a forum attendee said the team could include advanced nurse practitioner specialists in several areas.