

Scope of Practice for Advanced Practice Providers

Question

I am a nurse practitioner working in a large group practice that employs various types of healthcare providers. Recently, a physician asked me to perform a task outside of my scope of practice. Ultimately, the situation was resolved, but what should I do if this occurs in the future?

Answer

Scope of practice, particularly for advanced practice providers (APPs) – such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse specialists, etc. – can be complex because of disparate regulations and evolving standards. However, understanding and adhering to your scope of practice – as defined by state laws, organizational policies, and your experience/skill level – are essential risk management strategies. Failure to do so might result in adverse patient outcomes, disciplinary actions, and liability exposure.

Situations might occur in which an APP is asked to perform a task that is not within his/her scope of practice. This scenario might happen if the provider's scope of practice is not well understood by individuals delegating tasks, if confusion surrounds different scopes of practice for different types of APPs, or if time/convenience are factors. For example, an APP might be asked to:

- Prescribe a medication for which he/she does not have prescriptive authority
- Dispense a medication that only physicians are permitted to give per organizational policy
- Use equipment or perform a procedure for which he/she has no training or insufficient training

Even if a request seems innocuous, or the provider feels he/she is qualified to perform the task despite established boundaries, erring on the side of caution is advised.

To address potential issues related to scope of practice, consider the following strategies:

- Understand how scope of practice is regulated within your state and defined by professional associations and your healthcare organization. Routinely monitor for changes in state laws, professional guidance, and organizational policies related to scope of practice.
- Determine whether your healthcare organization has written policies and guidelines that clarify each type of practitioner's scope of practice. These documents can help delineate specific responsibilities, duties, functions, and limitations (such as prescriptive authority, consultation requirements, acceptable communication methods, etc.).
- If a collaborative practice agreement is a condition of hire, work with leaders in the organization and your supervising physician to develop appropriate parameters for collaborative care, such as supervision expectations, responsibilities and privileges, standards of care, and mutually agreed on clinical guidelines and pathways.
- Make sure that you have the competencies required to perform tasks that fall under your responsibilities and privileges. Even though a task might be within your legal scope of practice, appropriate training and experience are still required.
- If you have the authority to delegate tasks, be aware of which tasks are appropriate to delegate from a legal and organizational perspective. Understand the scopes of practice and skill levels of the individuals to whom you are assigning tasks.
- Work with organizational leaders to help educate providers and staff members about your role and specific responsibilities. Doing so will help others determine appropriate requests and provide patients with adequate and correct information.
- If you are assigned a task that you believe is outside of your scope of practice, ask for clarification. Raise concerns in a respectful but assertive manner. If the issue is not resolved, elevate your concerns up the chain of command.

- Work with others in your organization to address systems-related issues that might lead to circumstances in which providers feel pressured to perform tasks outside of their scopes of practice and expertise.

Resources

- [American Academy of Physician Assistants: PA Scope of Practice](#)
- [American Academy of Physician Assistants: State Laws and Regulations](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Anesthetists: Scope of Nurse Anesthesia Practice](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Anesthetists: Standards for Nurse Anesthesia Practice](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Anesthetists: State Legislative and Regulatory Requirements \(50-State Summaries\)](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Practitioners: Scope of Practice for Nurse Practitioners](#)
- [American Association of Nurse Practitioners: Standards of Practice for Nurse Practitioners](#)
- [Drug Enforcement Administration: Mid-Level Practitioners Authorization by State](#)
- [National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists: CNS Competencies](#)

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