

## Nurse Practitioner and Physician Assistant: Points for Comparison

### *Nurse Practitioner*

**Nursing model** with expanded scope of practice;  
Includes acts of medical diagnosis and prescription  
of medical, therapeutic or corrective measures in  
collaboration with a licensed physician  
Draws upon nursing knowledge and foundation

Primary focus areas are family health, adult health,  
child health, neonatal health, gerontological health,  
acute care, women's health

Clinical preceptorships of 500-800 hours depending  
on focus area; do not follow the medical "blocks"

Programs are at the Master's level or above

Regulation by State Board of Nursing or joint  
promulgation by Medical and Nursing boards

Licensed as independent practitioners; in some states  
collaborate with physician, in others collaboration  
not required

National certification required in most states

### *Physician Assistant*

**Medical model** designed to complement  
physician training  
Some programs require 200-500 hours of  
exposure in the health care arena prior to  
admission

Primary focus areas are primary care,  
medical specialties such as surgery,  
orthopedics, cardiology, ER

Clinical preceptorships of 2000 hours;  
preceptorships are "blocks" of clinical  
and follow medical model specialties

Variable educational levels from AD to  
PhD; trending toward Master's level  
Regulation by State Board of Medicine

Dependent practitioner, works under  
license and supervision of specific physician

National certification required to practice

Both NP and PA programs have rigorous curricula including grounding in pathophysiology and the physical sciences, pharmacology, population health, epidemiology and preventive health management.

Both NP and PA conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, and in virtually all states can write prescriptions

Both NP and PA are sometimes referred to as "mid-level providers" or "physician extenders"; a more derogatory term used is "mini-doc"

Both NP and PA have established good working relationships with each other and now have a national organization called the American College of Clinicians to promote their mutual interests

<http://www.amcollege.org/>