

Knowledge and Perception of Rural Non-Physician Healthcare Providers towards Full Practice Authority for APRNs

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Introduction. Full practice authority (FPA) allows advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) to legally perform their full scope of practice without physician oversight or collaboration. In July 2022 Kansas authorized FPA. Proponents argue FPA improves healthcare access and efficiency, but it is controversial. This study was designed to understand the perspectives of physician assistants (PAs) and APRNs (collectively advanced practice providers or APPs) toward FPA.

Methods. A survey was developed and administered to APPs at 27 rural healthcare sites in Kansas between June and July 2023.

Results. The survey generated responses from 36 APPs (7 PAs, 29 APRNs). All respondents indicated awareness of the change allowing FPA. Many (59%) reported knowing of an APRN altering their practice to operate without physician oversight. APPs reported belief that FPA will improve healthcare access, without altering patient management or costs. APPs indicated rarely requiring physician collaboration with APRNs requiring collaboration less frequently than PAs. A majority (85%) of PAs, but not APRNs, believe patients prefer APPs to be in a collaborative agreement with a physician. Most (60%) of APPs felt discussions of FPA caused tension between providers.

Conclusions. This study demonstrates that FPA is impacting rural healthcare in Kansas. APPs are aware of the changes and are modifying practices accordingly. APP opinions on FPA are mixed. Some differences are associated with healthcare roles. Tension caused by discussions of FPA may affect future practice. Additional research should include a larger sample of APPs, especially independently practicing APRNs, and comparing responses between APPs, physicians, and patients.