

Rural Healthcare Providers' Perceptions and Opinions of Their Own Scope of Practice: A Survey

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Introduction. Rural healthcare providers, including physicians and Advanced Practice Providers (APPs), play a critical role in ensuring access to healthcare for individuals living in rural areas. However, their scope of practice varies widely. This study assessed rural healthcare physicians' perceptions of their scope of practice and the impact of APPs on their practice in Kansas.

Methods. A cross-sectional survey was conducted at 30 practice sites across rural areas in Kansas. Responses from 68 MDs and DOs practicing in rural areas were analyzed. Participants reported their scope of practice and perceptions regarding the independent practice of APPs and team-based care.

Results. Physicians indicated notable skepticism towards the independent practice of APPs, with 58% of MDs and 71% of DOs disagreeing that it would improve access to care. However, strong support for team-based care was observed, with 90% of MDs and 100% of DOs agreeing it results in the best care outcomes. No significant differences were found based on gender or years of experience.

Conclusions. There is a dichotomy in attitudes towards independent practice by APPs and team-based care among rural healthcare providers. While there is skepticism about the former, there is strong support for the latter. These findings suggest that rural healthcare providers value collaborative approaches and have reservations about the expansion of independent practice by APPs. The study highlights the need for careful consideration and dialogue when addressing the role of APPs in rural healthcare settings.