Physician Supervision of and Collaboration with Advanced Practice Providers
Amy Sheehan, RN

There have been many considerations related to classifications surrounding the group of healthcare practitioners known as advanced practice providers. For the sake of clarity in this article, the term advanced practice providers (APPs) is meant to include nurse practitioners (NPs), certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs), certified nurse midwives (CNMs) and physician assistants (PAs).

Physician awareness and education with respect to the healthcare responsibilities and limits of APPs are key components of a safe practice.

"Simply adding somebody and saying they are going to improve your care or improve your productivity is almost always doomed to failure," said family physician Daniel Mingle, MD, chief physician executive and an owner of Maine MSO in Portland. "You need to be clear on how to incorporate that person in the practice and really understand how you want them to perform." 1

With the passage of regulations that allow some APPs to practice independently, one may ask why it is important to incorporate supervision and collaboration into one’s practice. Implementation of APP supervising/collaborating guidelines can increase patient safety, decrease provider and APP liability, and help ensure that the APP is practicing within his/her scope of practice.

When proper mechanisms are in place, mid-levels can help to improve patient satisfaction, efficacies, and quality of care. However, when appropriate supervising and collaborative measures are not in place, or are not followed, patient care can be negatively impacted and physician liability exposure can increase.2

An article in the Journal of Nurse Practitioners recommends the use of collaboration models to enhance effective collaboration between NPs and physicians. These models differentiate the responsibilities of NPs from those of physicians and are useful when a practice is developing a new NP position.3 The model includes collaborative practice agreements and mutually defined goals.4 A model such as this helps eliminate uncertainties about how the NP may function within an interdisciplinary team and also provides "a consistent resource for all practice members to reference." 5

The American College of Physicians (ACP) has stated:

ACP believes that the physician supervision of physician assistants and nurse practitioners is an integral and necessary aspect of patient care. In most settings, supervision includes review of the physician assistants’ and nurse practitioners’ activities and the physical presence of the physician at the location where services are delivered.6

The following risk management recommendations are offered as guidelines to assist with incorporating APPs into your practice.
Determine the setting in which the APP will practice:

- Specify inpatient, outpatient or both
- Specify the department(s) involved
- Identify the types of patients who may be seen
- Clarify hours of coverage

Define the APP’s Scope of Practice:

- Specify education and training requirements
- Specify licensure, certification and experience requirements
- Review and include state licensing rules and regulations
- Clarify the scope of practice within the organization, considering the following:
  - Which procedures are permitted
  - Whether APPs may refer independently
  - Permission to write admission, transfer and discharge orders
  - Permission to perform histories and physicals

Clarify the Supervision/Collaboration Process:

- Describe the supervising/collaborating physician responsibilities, which may include:
  - Availability or type of access to the physician by the APP
  - Evaluation of clinical care
  - Situations that require physician consultation
  - Chart review process (may be addressed by state regulations)
  - Case review - number of cases, oral or written review, co-signature expectations, and discussion documentation
  - Supervision of tasks, if any, that the APP may perform that are outside the scope of practice of the primary supervising physician and how they will be overseen
  - Secondary supervision coverage

Define Prescribing Authority:

- Ensure compliance with state rules and regulations
- Ensure compliance with DEA guidelines
- Define scheduled drug prescribing authority:
  - Specify whether the APP may initiate scheduled drug treatment, refill prescriptions, and/or change doses
  - Specify limits on types or amounts of specific scheduled medications that may be prescribed, as applicable
  - Specify the medications that the APP is prohibited from prescribing (e.g., buprenorphine, methadone, medical marijuana)

The following sample documents may be tailored to meet the needs of your practice.

- Sample PA Supervisory Agreement
- Sample APRN Collaborative Agreement
- Supervisory Physician Chart Review Tool

To access these sample documents, Coverys policyholders may visit the Policyholder Online Services website, select My Index and then select Tool Chest - Physicians and Practice Groups.


References

5. Ibid, without citation.