

# Practice Nursing

## What is understood about the role of the General Practice Nurse?

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# **What is understood about the role of the General Practice Nurse?**

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## **Abstract**

Within the United Kingdom there is a need to promote and increase the number of General Practice Nurses working within Primary Care. In comparison to their counterparts in secondary, practice nurses' numbers are significantly reduced. In recent years emphasis was placed on keeping individuals well and out of hospital and their conditions managed in primary care where possible. The role of the General Practice Nurse is still lesser known compared to the role of a staff nurse. Still today myths remain around the position including those eligible to apply and the development that is offered.

## **Key words:**

- General Practice Nurse
- General Practice Nurse myths
- Primary Care
- General Practice
- Advanced Care Practitioner
- Student Nurse

## What is understood about the role of the General Practice Nurse?

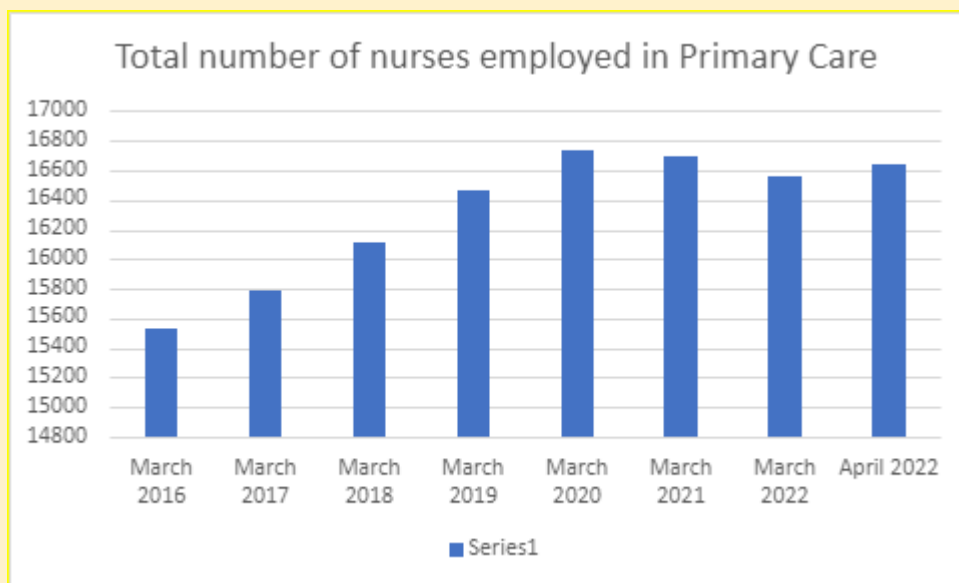
General Practice Nurses are highly skilled practitioners and are essential to ensure the smooth running of General Practice (NHS England and NHS Improvement 2021). These autonomous nurses lead, support and encourage their patients to manage their long-term conditions holistically. GPNs work with their patients to gather insights to help provide them with individual support tailored to their needs.

The role of a GPN is often misunderstood by individuals and even downplayed by GPNs themselves. Despite the role required, the role of the GPN is often unclear, and the scope and depth of the role are not understood by the wider public (Lauder 2022). For many people, their perception of primary care is based on their own views or opinions from friends and family. For most people, contact with nurses in surgery is limited, especially if they are fit and well. Likewise, for colleagues in other parts of the NHS, they rarely experience the reality of working daily in primary care as a GPN, which does not lead to a collective understanding of the role throughout the NHS leading to myths surrounding the role.

Such a lack of understanding of the role may affect the number of nurses choosing to work in primary care as General Practice Nurses. Since the 'Five Year Forward Review' published in 2014 by the UK (United Kingdom) Government emphasis continues to be on nursing and managing health conditions at home rather than admittance to hospital. Despite chronic diseases being one of the expertise of General Practice Nurses, there is still a lack of understanding and encouragement for nurses to take on the role. Forward thinking practices may be a step ahead and starting to 'grow their own' nurses from either HCA's or offering student nurse placements to encourage students to consider practice nursing once they are qualified (Baines 2022).

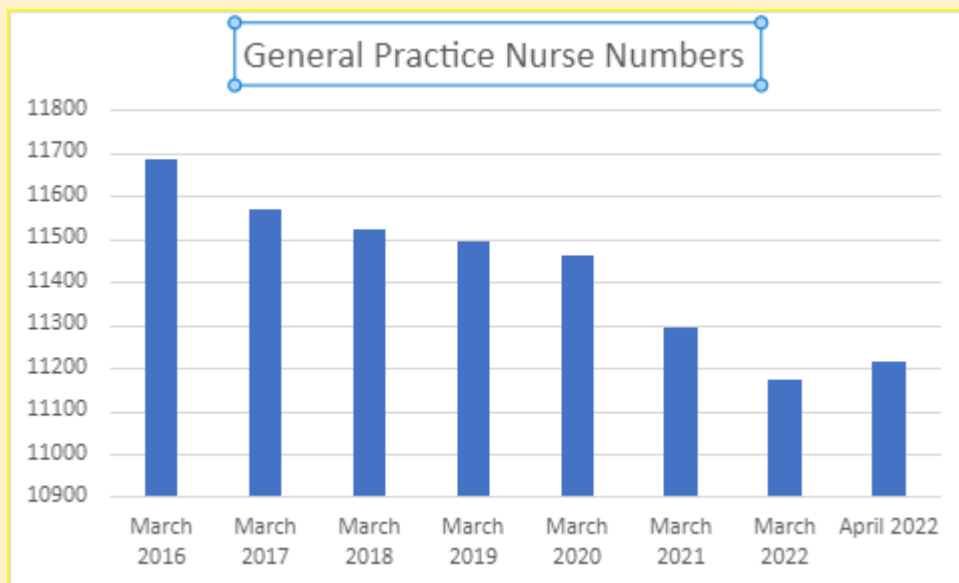
Despite the publication of the 'Five Year Forward View' for the past eight years, the number of GPN employed has not dramatically increased. Nevertheless, the total number of nurses, which includes; Advanced Care Practitioners, Nurse Dispensers, Nurse Specialists and Nursing Partners has increased from March 2016, table 1, albeit with a slight drop March 2022 before the upward trend seen again in April 2022 (NHS Digital, 2022).

*Table 1 All Nurses working in Primary Care (NHS Digital 2022)*



In comparison, table 2 demonstrates a decline in the number of GPNs employed. The data from NHS Digital (2022) clearly shows a decline in GPNs since March 2016. However, given the increase in advanced roles as detailed in table 1, this could explain the decline in numbers of GPN's.

Table 2 Total number of employed General Practice Nurses March 2016 -April 2022 (NHS Digital 2022)



### What is a practice nurse?

A General Practice Nurse does not have to be a nurse that has completed an adult nursing degree; those that have completed, child, mental health or learning disability degrees can also work as General Practice Nurses (NHS Health Careers, 2022) if they can demonstrate the relevant competencies. Not all nurses who apply to work as a General Practice Nurse may have decided on this career straight away. Some General Practice Nurses will have started their career as Healthcare Assistants and have developed a better understanding of the role whilst working alongside a General Practice Nurse prior to starting any nursing degree.

General Practice Nurses are part of the multidisciplinary team that makes up GP surgeries. Although they are autonomous practitioners, they can work with many staff including clinical pharmacists, doctors, Advanced Care Practitioners and physiotherapists. The nursing team can also vary with the inclusion of new roles such as Nursing Associates and Associate Practitioners.

### **I have only just qualified as a nurse, can I apply?**

Many GP surgeries, especially those forward thinking and looking at how the workforce is in Primary Care, are willing to employ newly qualified nurses as a practice nurse. It is also good for GP practices; they can shape these new nurses into the type of nurses they want. There are a few myths about General Practice Nursing and not being able to apply for these posts until a nurse has gained experience in critical care or accident and emergency, but these are groundless and incorrect (Gilroy, 2020).

In 2016, Ipsos Mori Research conducted a survey that found that student nurses believe that the role of a General Practice Nurse is a **more relaxed role compared to a nurse working on a ward**. Though, they also found that the role requires extensive experience that contradicts the slow pace of the role originally identified. The role of a General Practice Nurse is one that is busy throughout the day, seeing patients in ten-minute appointments. Despite the 2016 survey, student nurses continue to accept the myths surrounding nursing practice (Cunliffe, 2019).

For many student nurses, there are also thoughts that General Practice Nursing can deskill them of the skills they have learnt throughout their training (Cunliffe, 2019); but this is not the case. There is a possibility that some of the skills that they learned as a student will not frequently be required in the role of a General Practice Nurse, but they will learn additional skills to help them navigate the role of General Practice Nurse.

### **What is the initial orientation/induction like for General Practice Nurses?**

**Significant variations between practices have been identified regarding the induction of General Practice Nurses. While some practices offer a robust induction package, complete with structured courses, some practices only complete their own skills (Queens Nursing Institute 2019). Due to these**

differences and lack of consistency for General Practice Nurses, NHS England documented within the General Practice Nursing 10 Point Plan (NHS England 2017) that there needs to be a national standard for nurses transitioning into General Practice. To aid uniformity, the General Practice Nursing 10 Point Plan has an induction template designed for nurses entering General Practice for the first time. However, this model is not only for use with registered nurses but can be adapted for use with medical assistants and primary care assistants. It is also useful to direct student nurses towards this model if they are considering primary care for their careers. This consistent approach should ensure that all new General Practice Nurses receive an efficient and effective induction period to ensure they become skilled and confident autonomous practitioners.

### **Named Preceptor**

As well as an initial induction period, General Practice Nurses should be assigned a named preceptor (NMC, 2020) for their first 12 months. This recommendation aims to facilitate learning, set achievable goals, encourage and support development and confidence, and facilitate the transition process from student to qualified nurse. 'Transition shock,' a known phenomenon affects those newly qualified nurses within their first role after qualification (Clipper & Cherry, 2015, Wakefield, 2018) when the realisation of what is expected of them is realised. Although these nurses spend three years completing their nursing training and as much as newly qualified nurses can prepare for it, the true extent of it can only be felt once they have their pin and experience work as a qualified nurse. Similarly, for qualified nurses with experience working elsewhere in the NHS and nursing profession, changing the role and demands of primary care can lead to a shock to transition. Identifying a named preceptor can help reduce these feelings and offer support and guidance during the transition.

### Training during the first year – internal training

For most new General Practice Nurses, they will work through competencies set by their employer for their first 12 months of practice. Notwithstanding the complexity of the role, there are no mandatory regulated competencies for General Practice Nurses. Despite the lack of consistency in competency frameworks for General Practice Nurses across general practice, the Royal College of General Practitioners (2015) developed a framework which addresses common core competencies that nurses require to be a fully efficient General Practice Nurse, table 3. There are some competencies listed which will take longer than 12 months to complete such as chronic disease management and cervical screening.

*Table 3 Competencies from the Royal College of General Practitioners (2015)*

Competencies from the Royal College of General Practitioners (2015)		
Communication	Ear care	Mental health and well-being
Team Leadership	Wound management	Men's health
Personal and people development	Minor surgery	Women's health
Health, safety and security	Health promotion	Family planning and sexual health
Quality and service improvement	Health screening	Care of patients with long term conditions
Health and well-being	Cervical screening	Information and knowledge
Management of emergency situations	Immunisation of children and adults	General – learning and development
Therapeutic Monitoring	Travel health	General – development and innovation

### **Training during the first year – external training**

As well as internal training, General Practice Nurses can consider University courses to increase their knowledge and skill set. The Fundamentals of Primary Care/Practice Nursing is a 12-month university course aimed at equipping General Practice Nurses with the core skills essential for the role. After 12 months, those who have taken the course will not leave with any recognised qualification but will have gained theory and skills related to the role. For those in general practice, who wish to conduct further study at a University, there is a Specialist Practice Qualification in General Practice Nursing that nurses can opt to complete, which enable those to obtain an additional qualification which is recorded on the NMC register (NMC 2021).

### **I want to be a practice nurse, but do I have to become an ACP?**

In recent years there has been an increase in promoting Advanced Roles within Primary Care and encouraging General Practice Nurses to develop into Advanced Clinical Practitioners by undertaking Master's in Clinical Practice or standalone university modules such as minor illness. While there are nurses who want to develop their skills and knowledge to become an Advanced Clinical Practitioner, the role of a General Practice Nurse needs to be encouraged, celebrated, and supported. There is no requirement to advance the role of General Practice Nurse **with a master's degree** and there will be a lot of practice nurses that enjoy their day-to-day role and after three years of university studying nursing, further courses on completion they do not feel they want to attend universities for another three years for a master's degree if they do not feel it is going to improve their work. For said General Practice Nurses that would like to go back to University but do not want to become an Advanced Practitioner they could consider a master's in leadership especially for those General Practice Nurses that find themselves in leadership or managerial roles.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the General Practice nurse is complex, autonomy and skilled and essential to the running of General Practice. Despite this, the role is still frequently misunderstood and even downplayed by General Practice Nurses themselves. The role of the General Practice Nurse should be encouraged, valued, promoted, and encouraged and respected by nursing colleagues throughout the NHS.

### **Key points**

- A newly qualified Nurse can apply for a position of a General Practice Nurse
- There are various development opportunities for General Practice Nurses
- The role is one that is complex, varied and autonomous but rewarding

### **Reflective points**

- Did you have any preconceived ideas in relation to the role of the General Practice Nurse and if so how has your opinion changed now if at all?
- Have you heard any myths about General Practice Nurses, if so, what have you heard and how do you feel?

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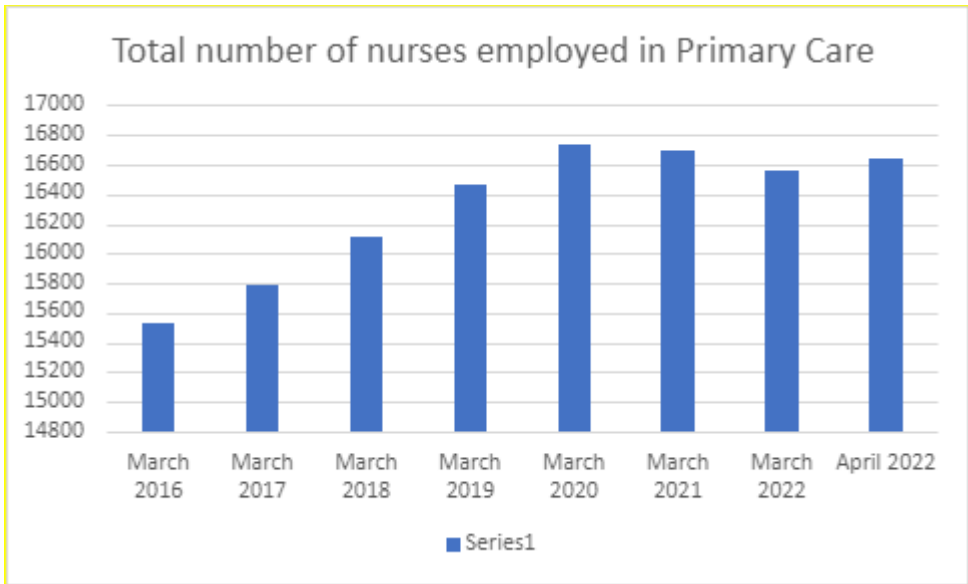
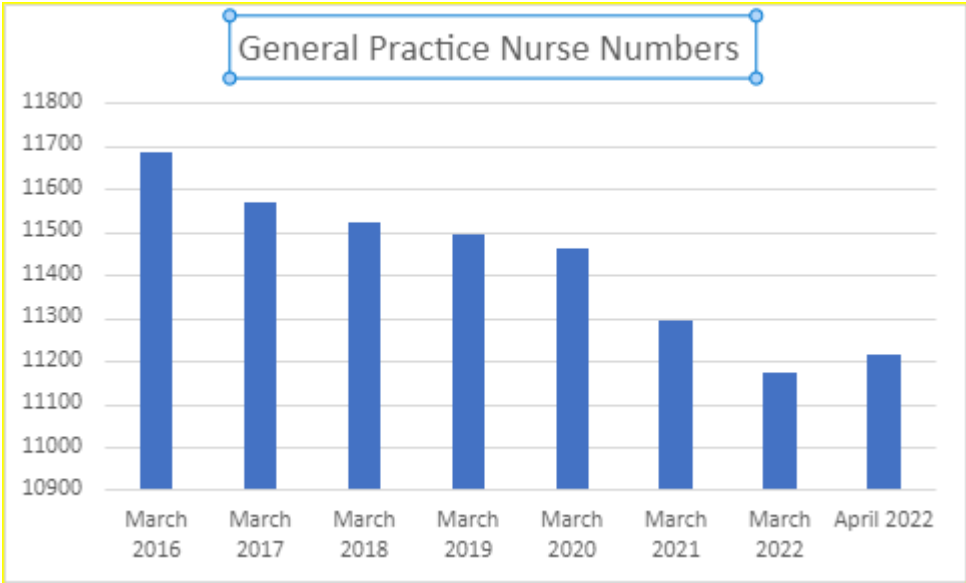


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## Summary of changes

I have highlighted all changes in yellow.

- I have added further information relating to specific standards/frameworks.
- More up to date references
- Changed the tables to look further back
- Altered the introduction
- Changed sentence structure