

# Nurse Practitioners Redefining the



Take Care Nurse Practitioner  
Marjorie Kozlowski treats  
a patient inside a Take Care  
Health Center in Chicago, IL.

# in the Driver's Seat

## Health Care Experience

by Sandra Festa Ryan

### Emergence of Convenient Care

The United States is in a national health care crisis: nearly 47 million people do not have health insurance; providers are asked to do and know more while getting paid less; ERs are overcrowded and serve as primary care centers, where a four-hour wait for a child's ear infection is normal.

Patients have become an afterthought and have very few options in our traditional health care setting. With limited access to high-quality care and decreased convenience due to a maxed-out system, patients want, need and are asking for health care on their terms.

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Is there one, simple answer to this problem? Absolutely not. However, one innovative, cutting-edge solution has emerged from the private sector – providing affordable, accessible quality health care for all, with highly-skilled nurse practitioners (NPs) at the forefront.

The Convenient Care Industry (CCI) offers health care clinics inside retail stores and pharmacies where high-quality care is delivered and driven by the needs of the patient. Staffed primarily by NPs, these clinics are treating thousands of patients nationwide for many common ailments that until now have been diagnosed and treated in crowded ERs, or left entirely untreated. The clinics also alleviate some of the stress on providers' offices, which at times are too busy or unable to provide immediate appointments.

## An Innovative Model of Care

I am the Chief Nurse Practitioner Officer for Take Care Health Systems, one of the Convenient Care Companies (CCCs) focused on delivering health care to patients by offering treatment and diagnosis for common conditions, while also providing preventive screenings and vaccinations.

At Take Care Health, we provide patient-first care, and work in collaboration with the local medical community to benefit the patient. The clinics are staffed by highly qualified family nurse practitioners, who

diagnose and prescribe for the ailments they treat – all in a convenient pharmacy setting with no appointments required. Clinics are open seven days a week and hours are extended into the evening and on weekends.

Through a team-based approach to health care, the clinics complement primary care providers (PCPs) and do not replace them. The centers have a referral list of local providers and specialists that they share with patients if they need a PCP or further evaluation or treatment. If patients do have a PCP, they are provided with a record of their visit which they can then share with their provider, or the clinic can send it at their request.

Not surprisingly, the clinics have served as an access point for many patients without regular health care providers, and patients who haven't seen a provider in decades.

Recently a gentleman went to one of our centers saying he was “just not feeling himself.” He had not been seen by a provider in 20 years, saw a Center in his local pharmacy and stopped to talk to the NP. After the NP realized that the gentleman needed an immediate cardiac evaluation, he was taken to the ER, where he was evaluated and admitted for surgery to have three stents placed. The patient's wife was so grateful she brought the NP flowers and told her she had “saved his life.” If the center had not been there, she said, “he would have waited it out,” which could have been tragic.

## Autonomy: Breakthrough Opportunities for NPs

Studies have shown that NPs are qualified and capable of managing 80-90 percent of the care provided by primary care providers, without referral to a physician. Outcomes of care provided by NPs are comparable to those of primary care physicians. NPs often score higher than physicians in the areas of disease prevention and continuity of care.

Convenient care settings are an incredible way for NPs to be on the forefront of health care delivery. Working at an in-store clinic provides a unique opportunity for NPs to practice independently – without a physician onsite. They are encouraged to build their own practice, market clinic services, and develop patient relationships and connections with the local medical community.

## Advocacy: For the Patient and the Profession

Throughout the 40-year history of the NP profession, NPs have consistently provided patient-centered, high-quality, compassionate care, using a holistic approach.

It's true that CCCs offer a more limited scope of service than what NPs might be used to in other settings. The core offering is access, affordability and quality health care. NPs in this setting might not be able

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to treat everything that comes to a CCC, but they are able to ensure that patients get to the right level of health care based on their needs. The NPs in these settings are changing the landscape of health care. We are there when the patient needs us, providing health care, promoting the benefits of a health care home, and educating the patient on health promotion and disease prevention.

The results speak for themselves: 30 percent of patients seen at a Take Care Health Clinic do not have a primary care provider; over 40% say that if it weren't for the clinic they would go to the ER, an Urgent Care Center or not seek treatment at all; and over one-third of the patients we see are uninsured.

The emergence of convenient care has elevated the profession to a new level – consistently garnering recognition within state and federal legislation, national medical and nursing organizations and the national media.



To be such a pioneer and passionate proponent of the NP profession at a time when the role is being widely recognized is an honor and responsibility, and one I do not take lightly.

I recall interviewing one of the first NPs at one of our clinics. An older woman, she listed “retired” on her resume. When I asked her what motivated her to interview with us, she responded, “I’m a pioneer. I know where we’ve been and I now know where we are going – I just have to be part of that.”

## The Future

Never before have nurse practitioners received such national recognition or a profession sparked such interesting dialogue. Governor Edward Rendell of Pennsylvania announced in January 2007 a statewide health care plan with the core foundation of providing health care to all citizens and creating efficiencies in the system to costs. Recognizing and expanding the role of nurse practitioners is one of the

core aspects of his plan – as allowing nurse practitioners to practice to the full extent of their training will help provide more access points, eliminate barriers to practice and create cost savings in the overburdened system.

By 2010, the United States will experience a shortage of 50,000 physicians; this shortage will rise to 200,000 physicians by 2020. Access to necessary health care will become even a greater problem for our patients. The emergence of the CCI underscores the value and need for NPs as quality health care providers – the autonomy they practice, projected expansion of their role, and their frontline approach to treating patients in need complements the future decrease in primary care physicians.

It is estimated that the CCI will need to hire a minimum of 10,000 NPs in the next few years to grow and expand the model. More colleges and universities are offering NP



Pittsburgh's Lead Take Care Nurse Practitioner, Rochelle Latkanich, introduces PA Governor Rendell at a press conference hosted at the Take Care Health Center in Irwin, PA on January 24, 2007. Rendell applauded the Take Care Health Center and called for an expanded role for nurse practitioners to further increase access to quality, affordable health care.

degrees, and the decline in primary care physicians is paving way to more NPs assuming the role.

Convenient Care is the future of accessible, high-quality care in the United States. The NP profession, selected as the premier provider in this setting, is one of pioneers that will lead the way in revolutionizing our health care system to meet the needs of patients. ☺



**Sandra Festa Ryan, MSN, CPNP**, is Chief Nurse Practitioner Officer, Take Care Health Systems Co-Chair, Quality Committee, Convenient Care Association. She has over 22 years of nursing experience, from pediatrics to geriatrics. A highly decorated veteran, Ryan proudly spent 16 years in the United States Air Force as a Nurse Corps officer and as an Air Force leader in diversified clinical settings.