

Advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners

The challenges of the future will not be cosmetic: the aging population, synonymous with an increase in chronic, degenerative, multiorganic diseases, shortage in primary care physicians and implementation of increasingly efficient cost-limiting procedures ... nowadays many stakeholders have difficulty imagining any means to face these challenges.

In this issue of the Swiss Medical Weekly, Sabina De Geest and her colleagues [1] propose a potential way to alleviate this future crisis: advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners have a tremendous potential to fill the gap between health needs and decreasing medical resources. It is astonishing to see that the use of nurse practitioners has been flourishing for many years in countries at both extremities of the wealth scale: in most countries of the Third World and in the USA. In developing countries, nurse practitioners provide the vast majority of care simply because of the lack of physicians and in the US, nurse practitioners play a key role in the cost containing strategy of the managed care systems ...

There is no doubt that also in Switzerland a lack of physicians and strong economic incentives will be the important factors which will help the promotion of nurse practitioners. What the authors of the present article show very elegantly is that the future collaboration of all the participants of the health system with a new generation of highly trained and clinically competent nurses will result in a major qualitative improvement not only in the care provided to suffering people, but also in many activities of prevention, teaching and research.

However there is one question mark left. The conditions which lead to a decrease in the "production" of physicians such as, among others, excessive workload and responsibilities, might also be present in the pathways followed by nurses, thus threatening the possibility for selecting candidates in these new professions. If this happens, it will be all the more important to promote strong and innovative teamwork ...

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Reference

- 1 De Geest S, Moons P, Callens B, Gut C, Lindpaintner L, Spirig R. Introducing advanced practice nurses / nurse practitioners in health care systems: a framework for reflection and analysis. Swiss Med Wkly. 2008;138(43-44):621-8.

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