



FAMILY ISSUE FACT SHEET

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Nurse Practitioner Scope of Practice

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A registered nurse practitioner (RNP) is defined in Arizona statute as a registered nurse who is certified by the Arizona Board of Nursing and a nationally-approved certifying body, has completed a nurse practitioner education course, and has a scope of practice which expands beyond that of a registered nurse (RN). While the scope of practice for RNPs is more extensive than that of a traditional RN, there are still some procedures RNPs may not perform. This legislation states that surgical abortion is one of the procedures that a nurse may not perform.

BACKGROUND

In November 2007, the Arizona Board of Nursing reviewed the case of Mary Andrews, a nurse practitioner who was performing abortions in Tucson. The board allowed Ms. Andrews to continue performing abortions while it has this matter under consideration. At their most recent meeting in January, the board did not discuss nor take action on Ms. Andrews' case.

Arizona statute defines the RNP's scope of practice to include such tasks as dispensing some medications, managing the "physical and psychosocial health status" of patients, and making independent decisions on proper health care.¹ Administrative rules explain that in addition to the tasks outlined in statute, a nurse practitioner may perform other tasks in collaboration with a physician. These tasks include admitting a patient into a health care facility, performing and interpreting medical tests, and prescribing medication when authorized.² No mention is made of procedures such as surgeries or abortions.

The Arizona Board of Nursing has also issued a number of advisory opinions clarifying scope of practice issues. RNPs may insert and remove laminaria sponges during abortions, as long as a physician is on site.³ RNPs may also administer cervical ripening agents for the induction of labor or when a licensed physician has documented fetal demise.⁴ RNPs may not, however, perform amniotomies (artificially rupturing the membranes of the amniotic sac to accelerate or induce labor). The Board of Nursing explains that there is a possibility the woman may require an emergency Cesarean Section, which is not within the nurse's scope of practice.⁵ Additionally, it is not within the scope of practice for a Registered Nurse to insert an intrauterine pressure catheter. The rationale for this is that "the catheter could perforate the placenta or the uterus, both of which are life-threatening situations which are not within the scope of practice for an RN."⁶

Arizona Revised Statutes § 32-2501 states that while physician assistants may perform “minor surgery,” the definition of minor surgery specifically excludes surgical abortion. While Arizona statutes and administrative rules are silent about whether an abortion is within a RNP’s scope of practice, there are some indications of what practices are appropriate. Abortion clinic regulations are outlined in A.R.S. § 36-449.03. Most of the medical aspects of abortion are assigned to the physician. The only role mentioned in this statute for a nurse practitioner is to provide “postoperative monitoring and care until each patient who had an abortion that day is discharged.” Throughout this section, a physician is always the one referred to for abortion procedures. While this statute is currently being challenged in court, it is not being challenged on this ground.

TALKING POINTS

- **Non-physicians should not perform abortions because of the danger to women.** Approximately ten percent of women suffer complications after abortions. This can include infection, uterine perforation, and excessive bleeding. Risky surgical procedures should be performed only by licensed physicians who can adequately address any complications.
- **Arizona policymakers should clarify Arizona law to specifically state that an abortion is not within a RNP’s scope of practice.** This bill makes the scope of practice very clear on this issue and prevents RNPs from continuing to endanger women by performing abortions. Current statutes and regulations are unclear on whether performing an abortion is within a nurse practitioner’s scope of practice. While the Board of Nursing is considering this question, they are allowing a nurse practitioner in Tucson to continue performing abortions indefinitely. This legislation is needed to address that practice.
- **The Arizona Legislature previously has defined the policy parameters for surgical abortions.** In statutes governing physician assistants and in statutes regulating abortion clinics, there has been bi-partisan support for prohibiting non-physicians from performing abortions.

CONCLUSION

Abortion is an invasive and often risky surgical procedure, and therefore should not be performed by anyone who is not a licensed physician. This legislation clarifies that nurses are not permitted to perform abortions.

¹ Ariz. Rev. Stat. §32-1601.

² Ariz. Admin. Code § R4-19-508.

³ Arizona State Board of Nursing, “Advisory Opinion: Insertion (and Removal) of Laminaria Sponge” (March 2006), *available at* <http://www.azbn.gov/AdvisoryOpinions.aspx>.

⁴ Arizona State Board of Nursing, “Advisory Opinion: Cervical Ripening Agents and Prostaglandin Suppositories” (Nov. 2006), *available at* <http://www.azbn.gov/AdvisoryOpinions.aspx>.

⁵ Arizona State Board of Nursing, “Advisory Opinion: Amniotomy” (March 2006), *available at* <http://www.azbn.gov/AdvisoryOpinions.aspx>.

⁶ Arizona State Board of Nursing, “Advisory Opinion: Intrauterine Pressure Catheters” (March 2006), *available at* <http://www.azbn.gov/AdvisoryOpinions.aspx>