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**GENERAL PRACTICE NURSES MAKE PERFECT SENSE (BUT
INDEPENDENT NURSE PRACTITIONERS DON'T) - AMA**

The AMA is pushing the Government to pave the way for more general practice nurses to ease the impact of doctor shortages around the country, but strongly warns against the introduction of independent nurse practitioners.

At its weekend meeting, the AMA Council of General Practice (AMACGP) reaffirmed its position that quality care for patients and access to that care is best achieved in a setting that is coordinated by GPs.

AMACGP Chair, Dr Rod Pearce said a move to independent nurse practitioners would dumb down the Australian health system.

“The best way to ease the pressure on the general practice workforce is to build primary care settings in which nurses are an integral part of the general practice team,” Dr Pearce said.

“The right way to go is to have nurses complement and assist the work of the GP, not have nurses become a substitute for GPs.

“General practice nurses help doctors see more patients and spend more time with patients who have chronic or complex illnesses – but they do so as part of the general practice team under the supervision of a GP.

“Accrediting nurses to go out and independently diagnose, prescribe and refer patients is the wrong way to go.

“Independent nurse practitioners cannot and should not replace the expertise and care provided by GPs.

“It would be consigning patients in areas of workforce need to inferior health care. The State Governments endorsing independent nurse practitioners are looking for an easy, and vastly inferior, solution – which is also an irresponsible and dangerous path to follow.”

The AMACGP has developed a draft general practice nurse policy to be presented to the AMA Federal Council in May for approval.

Under the AMACGP proposal, medical practices would establish clear protocols defining the role of the general practice nurse based on the specific needs of the community. Clinical tasks could only be undertaken by appropriately trained practice nurses under the direction of a GP.

The AMACGP is calling for a single MBS item number for general practice nurse clinical tasks, and wants the Practice Nurse Incentive Program extended to all general practices in Australia.

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