



September 21, 2012

Glen R. Stream, MD, MBI, FAAFP
President
American Academy of Family Physicians
P.O. Box 11210
Shawnee Mission, KS 66207-1210

Dear Dr. Stream:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), I am writing to clarify AACN's position related to the ability of nurse practitioners (NPs) to provide primary care services, which was unfortunately distorted in the American Academy of Family Physicians white paper on *Primary Care for the 21st Century*. The author uses a quote from AACN's past president Dr. Kathleen Potempa that was featured in the *New York Times* (October 2, 2011: "When the Nurse Wants to be Called Doctor") to seemingly convey that "responsible" nurse leaders like AACN agree that NPs are not equipped to provide primary care and lead healthcare teams because they are not physicians. This assumption is false and does not reflect AACN's views.

AACN recognizes that Nurse Practitioners are well prepared to provide primary care services independent of physician oversight. AACN stands behind Dr. Potempa's statements and readily concurs that nurse practitioners and family physicians are distinct providers, and the education and training used to prepare these clinicians is indeed different. However, both healthcare professionals are equipped to evaluate and treat patients seeking primary care services. A large and growing body of evidence confirms that care outcomes from equivalent services provided by NPs and physicians are the same. In fact, many patients often prefer seeing the NP when given the choice of providers. As leaders of patient-centered medical homes, nurse-managed health centers, and other practice settings, NPs clearly demonstrate the skills needed to successfully lead healthcare teams and effectively leverage the expertise of all providers on the team.

The delivery of primary care services is not the sole domain of family physicians and requires a broad array of specialists, including pediatricians, geriatricians, and mental health professionals. Any conclusions about what constitutes a safe, effective primary care provider must include a thorough review of the research on patient care outcomes before this determination can be made. Nurse practitioners pose no threat to the safety and welfare of patients seeking care. The predicted shortage of qualified primary care providers – including nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and family physicians– is indeed the true threat, which must be addressed collectively if we are to meet the needs of the nation's diverse patient population.

AACN and our member schools welcome any opportunity to work collaboratively with our colleagues across the health professions to foster a greater understanding of each discipline's contribution to safe patient care and advance care delivery models that use each provider to their full scope of practice and preparation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Marie Kirschling". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Jane Kirschling, DNS, RN, FAAN
President