

**Title:** **Assessing Consumer Response to Changes in the Profession of Nursing**

**Author:** Shoshanna Sofaer

**Purpose:** To explore how consumers might respond to changes in the roles and responsibilities of nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs).

**Background:**

- Research indicates that the public often do not have a clear understanding of what nurses do, and how they relate to other health professionals.
- NPs currently play important roles in the delivery of primary care, hospital care, and other forms of care.
- The degree of NP autonomy varies by each state's laws, affecting their scope of practice.
- Some NPs work as part of teams with physicians while others have their own organizational homes.
- NPs are viewed by some as having the potential to play an even larger role— involving greater independence from physicians, and perhaps different ways of being paid.

**Key Findings:**

- Consumers' responses related to the ability of NPs to practice independently varies widely.
- Some consumers are comfortable getting primary care from independent NPs; almost all are comfortable getting routine medical care or treatment for minor health issues from NPs working within a physician practice.
- Some consumers want their primary care provider to be a physician, period.
- Many people know little or nothing about the education/training of nurse practitioners and how it compares to that of nurses, physician assistants and physicians and said that detailed information on nurse and NP training would likely increase their comfort level with more substantial roles for both.
- Consumers who have had positive experiences with nurses and NPs felt they spend more time, communicate more fully and show more concern for patients than physicians, and take care of basic health care needs effectively.
- Nurses and NPs are viewed as motivated primarily by concern for patients, while physicians are seen as motivated by financial incentives as well as concern.
- Some consumers believed that nurses and NPs had substantially less education than physicians and would therefore be unable to make accurate diagnoses of more complex cases.
- Several worried that if NPs had their own practices and faced the same pressures as physicians, their advantages would gradually disappear and they would behave as many physicians do now (i.e. listen less, spend less time).

**Tables:**

**Table 1.** Focus group participant demographic characteristics

**Table 2.** Focus group participant experiences/attitudes

**References:**

This is based on non-published focus group findings.