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## How emergency nurse practitioners view their role within the emergency department: A qualitative study



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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The Emergency Nurse Practitioner (ENP) role has become established over the last two decades within emergency care. This role has developed to meet the rising demands of healthcare, combat the continuing medical workforce shortfall and address targets around healthcare delivery within emergency care.

The ENP role has been widely evaluated in terms of patient satisfaction, safety and outcome. To date there is no published literature exploring what drives senior nurses to undertake this role which involves additional clinical responsibility and educational preparation for no increase in pay.

**Aim:** This research seeks to explore how Emergency Nurse Practitioners view their role within the Emergency Department and Emergency Care Team.

**Methods:** A qualitative approach was utilised in order to gain greater in-depth understanding of ENPs' perspectives. A purposive sample of eight ENPs was chosen and semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded. The transcribed interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to look for any recurrent themes.

**Findings:** Following analysis of the data, four main themes emerged with a total of eight sub themes.

- Inter-professional working – Within the ED and outside the ED, with nurses and team culture.
- Role development – Expanding the role, the future of the role.
- Education – The role of education, the barriers.
- Motivation

The findings suggested that whilst the role had been accepted amongst doctors within the ED, there was still a lack of understanding of the role outside the ED and conflict still existed amongst junior nurses. ENPs were motivated to undertake the role in order to gain greater job satisfaction. The findings also highlighted the concerns regarding financial remuneration for the role, lack of standardisation of the role and educational preparation.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that education has a key role in the development and acceptance of the role and that ENPs are disappointed with the lack of financial remuneration for the role.

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### 1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the National Health Service (NHS) is a massively complex organisation, which is required to deliver high quality healthcare and meet an ever increasing demand for its services from an increasing and ageing population (The King's Fund, 2012). The NHS next stage review (Department of Health, 2008) sought to improve services offered to patients, raising the quality in healthcare. In order to do this the development of medical

substitution roles within the NHS have become increasingly popular. This aims to address the issues of rising public demand for services, a reduction in junior doctors' working hours and the delivery of target driven care as part of the Government's reforms in healthcare (The King's Fund, 2012).

The Emergency Nurse Practitioner role (ENP) in the last two decades has sporadically expanded within emergency care in the UK. This has helped address the increasing burden of rising annual emergency attendance and combat the continuing medical workforce shortfall. With the introduction of the four hour emergency access target in 2004 in England (Department of Health, 2001), the expanded role of ENP services has increasingly become a popular solution in meeting this target. Emergency Nurse Practitioners are now employed widely throughout the UK and the role has been widely evaluated within the published literature and

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found to be acceptable to patients (Barr et al., 2000; Byrne et al., 2000; Carter and Chochinov, 2007; Sakr et al., 1999; Touche Ross, 1994).

Interestingly, despite the role in the UK being widely subjected to evaluation in terms of acceptability, patient safety and outcome, there are no published literature studies which explore the motivation of senior Emergency Nurses to take on these new roles with considerable additional clinical responsibility but no increase in pay or banding. Since the NHS is coming to rely on these roles to deliver a significant proportion of the daily work of the NHS, it is important to understand the underlying motivation factors. This research sets out to explore how Emergency Nurse Practitioners view their role within the Emergency Department.

## 2. Literature review

The aim of this study was to systematically search published literature to identify any existing studies of perceptions, opinions or job satisfaction encompassing the role from the ENPs' perspective.

Online databases were used to enable the researcher to specify subject searches and include key words, criteria and limitations, such as English language texts. The following databases were used: Allied and Complementary Medicine, British Nursing Index, Medline and Cinahl. The Cochrane Library's systematic literature reviews were also used.

To ensure a thorough search, reference lists of retrieved journals were checked to ensure no relevant journals had been missed. The grey literature, including Google Scholar and Royal College of Nursing and Department of Health websites' resources were reviewed.

### 2.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Key words utilised within the search were: Accident and Emergency, Emergency Department, Casualty, Emergency Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Practitioner, Role/Task Substitution, Nurse/Doctor Satisfaction, Healthcare Professional/Patient Satisfaction. Only papers in English were sought as translation services were not available. Papers published between 1994 and 2011 were included to cover any variations in progression of Emergency Nurse Practitioner service development and healthcare changes. International journals were included to identify how the role has been implemented and utilised internationally, to identify any influences from international development of the role on UK practice.

142 abstracts were inspected and 74 full text articles were obtained. Of the 74 papers reviewed, 33 were included in the literature review. A further 13 were included after snowballing of the reference lists, making a total of 46 papers. The excluded articles were felt to add nothing to the evidence base as they were evaluating different issues within emergency care.

### 2.2. Context

The development of medical substitution roles within the National Health Service (NHS) are becoming an increasing factor in addressing the growing shortfall in the medical workforce (Hoskins, 2011). Political and economic drivers have also influenced the decision to develop and utilise medical substitution roles as a way of rectifying the increased demands on emergency care. Emergency Nurse Practitioners are now employed widely throughout the UK and the role has been widely evaluated and increasingly accepted by medical colleagues and patients (Barr et al., 2000; Byrne et al., 2000; Sakr et al., 1999; Touche Ross, 1994).

### 2.3. International context

In 2008, an international survey by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) identified 23 countries with formal Nurse Practitioner programmes (Pulcini et al., 2010).

Currently in the UK, unlike America, Australia and Canada, there is no registrable qualification for the ENP, or clear definition of the role or use of the title ENP (Considine et al., 2006; Thrasher and Purc-Stephenson, 2007; Wilson and Shifaza, 2008). As a result, the number of nurses practicing as ENPs in the UK is unknown.

Analysis of the final literature review established the following key themes which clarified the healthcare professional's perceptions of the role:

- The perceptions of medical colleagues towards the role of the ENP (Currie and Crouch, 2008; Fisher et al., 2006; Lee and Bailey, 2007; Martin and Considine, 2005; McGee and Kaplan, 2007; Thrasher and Purc-Stephenson, 2007; Tye and Ross, 2000; Welland et al., 2010)
- Nurses' feelings towards ENP colleagues (Fisher et al., 2006; Thrasher and Purc-Stephenson, 2007)
- Lack of role clarity, standardised educational preparation and professional identity (Currie and Crouch, 2008; Elsom et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2006; Griffin and Melby, 2006; Keane et al., 2008; Lee and Bailey, 2007; Thrasher and Purc-Stephenson, 2007; Tye and Ross, 2000; Wilson and Shifaza, 2008)

Despite a thorough review of the literature, no papers have been identified which explore what motivates senior Emergency Nurses to take on the additional onerous clinical and legal responsibilities of the ENP with little or no identified rewards. Whilst some authors mention the benefits of an additional career pathway the ENP role offers, there is no evidence that the views and perceptions of current ENPs have been explored in any depth. In order to contribute to the stability of such an experienced workforce, it is important to understand what motivates staff to stay in such a role and identify issues which may need addressing in order to retain the experienced workforce in the high pressure specialty of emergency care.

## 3. Methods

A qualitative approach using interviews was undertaken. Using this approach was vital in order to explore, understand and gain greater knowledge of the experiences, motivations and issues held by the ENPs.

Understanding their experiences and allowing them to express their own interpretations and meanings of events and situations they have experienced in their own terms allows greater understanding of their perspective of the role. The opportunity to explore and probe deeper into what individuals were saying was key to understanding the motivations and issues with the role.

The sampling strategy was a non-probability purposive sample. Using purposive sampling allows specific participants, the ENPs, to be selected for their particular knowledge and expert opinion (Polit and Beck, 2005). It is this specific group who possesses the key features and characteristics required to enable the researcher to gather the information to answer the research question.

The inclusion criteria for participants focused on registered nurses practicing as ENPs working within the researcher's own Trust. The ED has an annual attendance of 67,000 patients and provides a 24/7 ENP service, with ENPs seeing some 22,000 patients a year.

Due to time constraints only participants from the workplace were utilised as it provided easy access into the organisation. It was felt this could provide richness to the data with an already existing understanding of the phenomena. Furthermore it enabled deeper probing for richer data due to an already established rapport with participants. It

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