

**Letter to Editor**  
**The Washington Post**  
**April 20, 2009**

The patient backlog at North Carolina's HealthServe clinic illustrates how the need to make better use of advanced practice registered nurses is a necessary component of health system reform ["In North Carolina, Recession Breeds a Health-Care Crisis," April 20]. HealthServe offers primary and preventive care to residents who qualify based on income but the clinic can't meet the demands of a 380-person waiting list. Meaningful access to health care requires a robust and well-utilized healthcare workforce.

This is where the services of currently underutilized advanced practice nurses – such as nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse-midwives -- can relieve burdens on the health care system, given a funding source. For example, nurse practitioners, the fastest growing group of primary care professionals in the country, are educated at the master's or doctoral level to perform comprehensive health assessments and provide primary and preventive care services. They are licensed to diagnose; order and interpret tests; and prescribe medication – in short, to provide services on par with those offered by primary care physicians.

Advanced practice nurses are one solution to expanding care to medically underserved populations in Greensboro and across the country. The key is to integrate them into our health care system more effectively.

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