

“Hello, I’m an Advanced Nurse Practitioner” – What is that all about??

Advanced Nurse Practitioners have been working in various settings in the NHS for a number of years, but may be quite a new concept to Wester Ross. As with anything new, there will be understandable uncertainty amongst both the public and other health professionals, as to what these new people are all about, what are they supposed to be doing, what they can or can’t do?

As (I think?), the first ANP to put a toe in the beautiful water here, I have been asked to give some background information about the role, so you might know a little more of what to expect if you are offered an appointment to see an ANP as an alternative to a Doctor.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (2005) defines Advanced Nurse Practitioners as:

Highly experienced and educated members of the care team, who are able to diagnose and treat your healthcare needs or refer you to an appropriate specialist if needed. They can –

- *Take a comprehensive patient history*
- *Carry out physical examinations*
- *Use their expert knowledge and clinical judgement to identify the potential diagnosis*
- *Refer patients for investigations where appropriate*
- *Make a final diagnosis*
- *Decide on treatment, including the prescribing of medicines*

I can speak from experience that training to achieve ANP status is indeed rigorous. From the assessment of patients under examination conditions alongside medical students, to video recording of consultations for external scrutiny, to the huge portfolio of competencies to provide evidence for. Not forgetting the academic requirements for a Masters degree (I actually did two Masters degrees before I felt I had achieved the right level to wear the badge).

But – after all that, I am very definitely a nurse and not a doctor. I continue to take pride in wearing a uniform and I never forget that I am a nurse first and foremost. Although I can confidently manage many of the everyday health problems that might come through the door in General Practice, an important part of my role is to be well aware of my limitations. As such, if there is something I am not too sure about, or is beyond my expertise, I will always seek advice from a doctor (or another professional as appropriate). This is no different from any good GP, who will always know when he or she needs to seek help from a consultant or another colleague.

So – why is the NHS bothering with all this?

It is no secret that GPs’ time is very pressured. I’m sure you will have seen in the press about the problems with recruitment that many areas are facing. Whilst ANPs are in no way a ‘replacement’ for a doctor, they can be a great help as part of a multi-disciplinary team, making sure that the doctor’s precious time is kept for what is most important, caring for the patients with the most urgent or complex of needs, those coming to the end of life, or those who just need a bit of extra time.

There are no immediate plans for how ANPs may be part of the team in Wester Ross, for the moment it is likely to be just a trickle of an introduction, but I hope you will be happy to be the pioneers, and be better prepared for what to expect when you hear the term ‘Advanced Nurse Practitioner’.

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