PARTY-Tips for youth friendliness from the GP field #9 –
The role of Practice Nurses

Our PARTY research team at Melbourne University have shown that Practice Nurses have a role in making general practice more youth friendly by having them work in close collaboration with GPs. More engaged Practice Nurses can improve the level of care delivered to young people in general practice.

Practice Nurses can often provide more time to see young people than GPs can (due to different time pressures), which can lower the barriers that young people experienced in accessing GP services.

Envisioning a new and expanded role for the Practice Nurse is one strategy which can address some of these barriers.

In some of our PARTY practices we see Nurses who
- provide advice and information to young people about their own bodies.
- administer HEEADSSS psycho-social screen
- conduct brief interventions
- provide advice and information to young people about navigating the health system
- provide linkages to outside services and organisations.
- engage in outreach to schools and youth organisations
- run youth clinics
- provide a linkage within & between different parts of the general practice itself.

Talking to these Nurses we hear that to take up this expanded or new role they need to
- have good communication skills
- be non-judgemental (this enables them to build trust and rapport with young people)
- have a good understanding of adolescent development
- know the services available to young people (both local and further afield, medical & non-medical)
- understand the issues young people face
- ensure that confidentiality is maintained with young people at all times.

In our work with General Practice and young people we have seen that nurses are cognisant of the barriers young people face when seeking care in general practice, in particular
- issues to do with confidentiality
- knowledge about health services
- inaccessibility of general practice for many young people, either due to transport problems, affordability or the heavy GP workload
- the comfort of GPs when deal with some issues that young people required assistance with.

Practice Nurses can facilitate young people’s access to care and specifically work toward
- building an accepting practice environment
- ensuring confidentiality
- developing and practising good communication skills
- managing demands to allow them to spend adequate time with young people.

When taking up this expanded role Practice Nurses report that the most significant health issues they see young people facing are mental health, sexual & reproductive health, diet & obesity and risk taking behaviours.
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Many Practice Nurses working in practices associated with PARTY report that after being appropriately trained they feel confident to:

- work with young people and help them with their issues
- administer screening questionnaires
- conduct a brief intervention.

In particular, practice nurses feel that being trained in counselling and listening skills is key to effectively undertake the new role we have described.

We know that remuneration arrangements can sometimes be a barrier to Practice Nurses taking on a broader role. Equally we are aware of practices who have overcome this obstacle. Young patients and older patients are all benefitting from this new flexibility.

If you would like to think some more about broadening the role of Practice Nurses in your clinic, please get in touch with us.

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This note is based on the article “Potential Roles for practice nurses in preventative care for young people – a qualitative study”, Hart et al, published in the Australian Family Physician, August 2012.

- The Melbourne University General Practice and Primary Health Care Academic Centre offer a Postgraduate Diploma in Primary Care Nursing which is a tailored course for nurses working in primary care. It delivers comprehensive and evidence-based education in youth health, sexual and reproductive health, women’s health and chronic conditions. The course also teaches strategies for health promotion, prevention, risk management and advanced nursing practice. This is a part-time course delivered by flexible education (distance, online and face-to-face).

More information can be found on the website at http://www.gp.unimelb.edu.au/prospective_students/pgrad/Diploma_PCN.html

- Remember too the Adolescent Health GP Resource Kit. This book can be downloaded without charge in full from http://www.caah.chw.edu.au/resources/#03 It can also be purchased in hard copy form.