

Information regarding LD 295

Prepared by Deborah Hagler, MD; President, Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Pediatricians attend 4 years of college, 4 years of medical school and then do a minimum of 3 years additional training in the specialty of pediatrics before they are allowed to care for a child without supervision. Nurse practitioners attend 4 years of college and do 2 years of additional masters work to become a nurse practitioner this includes clinical course work. Unless specifically a pediatric nurse practitioner program, general NP programs often dedicate less than 3 months to pediatric clinical rotations, Most clinical time is dedicated to adult care.

Children's care is deceptively nuanced. They are constantly growing and changing at predictable patterns and are expected to attain certain milestones on a timetable. Deviations from the patterns can clue the onset of substantial illness or be entirely within a normal range. Pediatric training is devoted to understanding some of these variations and how to approach these challenging uncertainties. This detailed training and in-depth study and practice under the guidance of experienced physicians brings with it a dedication to prevention and the science behind it, and experience with acute care - especially the ability to identify the so-called "needle in the haystack" -that rare child with critical acute illness that initially has only the subtlest indication of the serious nature of the illness brewing. The lack of training and experience can lead to missing critical signs there is a serious underlying condition.

Physicians with 7 years of training behind them have a healthy respect for the responsibility placed upon them when caring for other people's children and are appropriately daunted by the breadth and at times gravity of pediatric illness the first time they see patients without a more senior clinician available for consultation. There are many exceptional nurse practitioners caring for children and adults. They have worked and gained experience and skill aside clinicians when newly minted from school and all have benefited from these experiences.

Because of differences in training, NP's fresh out of school and new to practice likely do not have a full appreciation of the wide spectrum of pediatric illness and the marked variation in the presentation of specific pediatric illnesses. With time and supervision most will become excellent clinicians and provide skilled care to those they serve. However, the learning curve should be respected and supervision post graduation is clearly indicated to promote the best care for patients.