## How Many Patients Can a Nurse Practitioner See in a Day?

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## Question

Is there a limit on the number of patients a nurse practitioner can see in a primary care setting in an 8-hour work day?



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Three issues must be addressed:

- How many patients can a nurse practitioner (NP) see safely?
- How many patients is it logistically possible to see in 8 hours, given the practice's physical plant and operational set-up, the patient acuity, the ability of the patients to communicate, and the ability of patients to move on their own?
- How many patients does an NP need to see to keep the practice financially sound?

Only the NP and his or her supervisor can determine the answer to the first 2 questions. I can answer the third question. Generally, an NP needs to see 20 patients a day to generate enough money to make a practice profitable. However, that number depends on the fee schedule, the NP's salary and benefits, the practice's overhead expenses, and the practice's expectation of profit. The math goes like this:

- 20 patients x 5 days/week x 47 weeks per year = 4700 patients per year.
- If the average charge per patient is \$45, \$45 x 4700 = \$211,500 generated per year.
- If the NP's salary and benefits = \$100,000 (\$80,000 plus \$20,000 for employer taxes and benefits) and overhead expenses = \$80,000 (rent on space, electronic medical record, assistants, telephone, supplies, equipment, electricity, malpractice insurance, etc.), then profit is \$31,500.

Some practices will be happy with \$31,500 in profit, and some will want more. However, 20 patients per 8-hour work day is considered to be a reasonable expectation for primary care.