

THE PRESCRIBING TRENDS BY NURSE PRACTITIONERS TO OLDER ADULTS IN ONTARIO: 2000 – 2010

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Statement of Purpose: In 2010, nurse practitioners (NPs) employed in Ontario, primarily in the primary care setting numbered 1,424 a four-fold increase since 2000. The goals of this study were: (1) to describe the trend of medication prescription to persons ≥ 65 years of age in Ontario by NPs, from 2000 to 2010, (2) to describe the common classes of medication prescription and (3) to determine geographical variation in patterns by Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

Methods: We conducted a population-based retrospective cohort study and identified all NPs certified between 1998 and 2010 in Ontario who had dispensed medications to patients ≥ 65 years during this time period. As a comparator, we identified all prescription medications dispensed to patients ≥ 65 years by family physicians in the same time period.

Results: The number and proportion of NPs who dispensed medication to patients ≥ 65 years increased from 2000 to 2010 [44/340 (12.9%) to 888/1424 (62.4%)]. The number and proportion of medications dispensed for chronic conditions by NPs increased; in 2010, 9 out of 10 medications dispensed were for chronic conditions. There was substantial variation in the proportion of NPs dispensing medication per older population across LHINs, with central urban regions having the lowest proportion.

Conclusions: NP prescribing to older adults, and in particular medications related to chronic conditions, has increased substantially across the 10 years. The geographical variation suggests that the integration of NPs into primary health care has not been consistent. Further research needs to explore the health outcomes associated with NP prescribing practice patterns.