

Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I consider the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner program? What sets this program apart from other programs?

As a student in the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner program, you will develop the competencies to autonomously diagnose, order and interpret diagnostic tests, prescribe pharmaceuticals and perform specific procedures within your legislated scope of practice.

The curriculum is based on a conceptual model that is designed on the philosophy and principles of primary health care and the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association Registered Nurse (Nurse Practitioner) Standards and Core Competences (2011).

This program stands out because you can complete the program through the internet on a part-time basis within a two-year timeframe. This lets you build your professional credentials while maintaining job and family responsibilities. Your learning is supported by licensed practicing nurse practitioners and experienced nurse practitioner preceptors.

What are the program highlights?

- Builds on registered nursing experience
- Integrates principles of primary health care
- Interprofessional collaboration and practice
- Health prevention and disease prevention
- Management of common conditions across the health span
- Strong clinical decision making processes
- Community development and cultural competence

Is this program approved?

This program is approved by the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA) for nurse practitioner education in primary care. This means that the program develops the student's competencies as described by the SRNA (2011) Registered Nurse (Nurse Practitioner) RN(NP) Standards and Core Competencies.

How many courses are there in the program?

There are eight theory courses and seven concurrent clinical courses.

You will have 13 weeks to complete each theory course. Some courses have prerequisites.

What courses are offered online?

All courses in the program are offered online through the World Wide Web. The curriculum uses textbooks, online articles, guided discussion and interactive activities to teach the content. Experienced nurse practitioner faculty support students through electronic course mail. All course exams are written at an approved test site within one hour of your community. Clinical

courses can be completed in your community provided the clinical experience meets the course objectives.

How will I progress through the program?

Regular evaluation of the course learning outcomes is the basis of learning plans. Students and faculty mutually agree on strengths and weaknesses in achieving the competencies. To guide this process, multiple assessment strategies are provided regularly at appropriate intervals. These may be self-evaluation, case studies, collaborative assignments, quizzes, exams, reflective discussions, and preceptor, faculty and peer feedback.

The minimum pass for the theory courses is 60%. The minimum pass must be achieved on each assignment or exam. The pass for the clinical courses is pass / fail. If you fail two courses, you will be asked to discontinue from the program.

You will complete 700 hours of clinical practice experiences in primary care settings with a licensed registered nurse (nurse practitioner) and limited hours may be completed with a primary care physician and a pharmacist. Community members serve as mentors in the community component of your clinical practice experience.

Do you accept students from outside of Saskatchewan?

Yes. All courses are offered through the World Wide Web so they can be completed anywhere as long as the clinical objectives can be met. Please check with your regulatory body to determine if this program meets jurisdictional educational requirements if you want to be licensed as a nurse practitioner in that jurisdiction.

How much study time will I need to complete each course?

The theory hours are the estimated hours should the course be presented in lecture format. The amount of time to study varies according to the study skills of the learner. A reasonable guideline is that for each theory hour, four hours of study time are required per week. Clinical hours and community hours is the actual time required to complete those activities. Former students recommend their success in the program is enhanced if they reduce their nursing practice hours to part-time.

Students are expected to check into the online course at least 2-4 times per week.

Can I take more than one course in a semester?

The program is designed to be completed part time over seven semesters. Students complete one theory and one clinical course each semester (fall, winter and spring). After taking the pre-requisite courses - NURS 296 (Foundations of Advanced Nursing Practice) and CLIN 202 (Foundations of Advanced Nursing Practice Clinical), you have the option of taking more than one course per semester. Many students work in registered nurse roles and have numerous personal responsibilities; therefore, taking one course per semester may be the best option.

Can I work and complete the program?

Yes you can, however, be very aware that you are required to complete a minimum of 100 hours (13 days) clinical experience during each 13 week course. Most students move into part-time positions while in the program. Accessing bursaries and scholarships to support your finances is a good option.

I have not been in school for awhile. Do you have any suggestions for enhancing my study skills?

There are wonderful study skills tools on the internet. One that former students recommend is Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R). Type this into a search engine to find resources using this strategy. SIAST Libraries also has a wealth of resources that they direct you to help you study, write exams and write papers.

I completed pharmacology with my nursing degree. Do I need to take PHAR 271 (Clinical Drug Therapy)?

Yes. The program's advanced pharmacy skills and knowledge is covered in two courses. Students are required to complete PHAR 271 (Clinical Drug Therapy) and PHAR 272 (Pharmacotherapeutics for Advanced Practice). PHAR 271 can be taken prior to being accepted to the program.

I took a health assessment course over a year ago. How do I meet the admission requirements of "health assessment skills within the last year prior to acceptance to the program?"

Complete health histories and physical exams are completed at an advanced level in this program. In order to ensure that you are ready to begin the clinical experience at the program start date, your basic skills must be up to date.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is used to validate these skills. For the PLAR Fact Sheet and Candidate Guide that describes the process, go to [PLAR Availability](#). This validation of skills must be completed prior to being accepted to the program.

If you have taken your health assessment course over five years ago and have not been performing comprehensive health histories and physical exams in your nursing practice, an option is to take NURS 225 (Health Assessment) which is offered in the winter semester.

When can I start courses in the program?

You must first successfully meet the admission requirements for the program. The program begins each September and courses are available over 13 weeks in the fall, winter and spring semesters.

I have never taken online courses before. How do I know if I have the attributes to be a successful online learner?

Distance education takes added time and energy, therefore it is suggested that you evaluate your readiness for learning via distance. Self assessment tools to determine if online learning is right for you are available on the internet and on request to the program.

Personal attributes of the successful online learner are:

- Ability to assume responsibility for own learning
- Self-directed and motivated
- Persistent and confident
- Ability to problem-solve
- Active in their learning
- Effective time management skills
- Disciplined to study without external reminders

Basic technical skills that you need include:

- Basic computer literacy
- Word processing
- Searching on the internet
- Taking time to complete available online tutorials and use help screens

What kind of supports can I put in place to ensure I am successful as an online learner?

SIAST has a wealth of tutorials and support tools to ensure your success. A successful online student searches out these tools and uses them. When a student is registered into a SIAST course for the first time, the student is also enrolled in a free orientation course called “Online learning made easy.” Students are strongly encouraged to complete this short course to learn about supports SIAST has in place to enhance your success. Students who complete the orientation tools before the course begins have reduced frustration when the course starts.

Student success is also enhanced through family and employer support. Families can provide childcare or assist with household chores. When employers allow flexible hours for school obligations or use of a computer at work, success is also enhanced. Some students have found that having a personal laptop that can be taken with them wherever they go enhances their success.

What is the application deadline for the program?

The program intake is limited and admission method is first qualified/first admitted. You are encouraged to apply before **March 1** to allow sufficient time to finalize your application file and make personal and financial arrangements in time for the September start date. Applications received after March 1 will be waitlisted.

Can I take any courses prior to being accepted to the program or if I do not intend to enroll in the program?

You can take PHAR 271 (Clinical Drug Therapy) prior to being accepted/enrolled in the program. It is available each semester providing minimum enrollment for the course is met.

You can also take NURS 225 (Health Assessment) to update your health assessment knowledge and skills. This is an option instead of completing the [Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition \(PLAR\)](#) process.

What is the cost for the program each year?

The annual cost varies according to the current tuition rate and the credit units for each course that you are taking. The link to the tuition for the courses is here.
http://www.gosiast.com/admissions/fee_tuitions/payment_fees.shtml

Tuition for the entire year is due on the first day of classes in the fall.

Where can I buy my books and other materials?

Information on purchasing textbooks and course manuals will be provided when you register. Material is available for purchase online, by phone, or in person.

How will I communicate with the faculty?

Program faculty are available to support you via the telephone and email. They will respond to your questions within 24 hours and you will interact with other students to discuss theoretical concepts and reflect on your learning.

We encourage students to discuss any difficulties they encounter throughout the program with the faculty. You should not struggle with a problem too long as this may delay your progress in the program.

I have always attended formal classroom education. Distance learning seems like it would be a lonely experience. Is there any way I could have contact with my classmates?

While distance learning can be a lonely experience, all students are given the opportunity to complete a Freedom of Information consent form. If you agree to allow our faculty to release your contact information to other students, then you can be linked up with your classmates. Your information is only given to other classmates and is only released with your consent.

Online students have an opportunity to chat, conduct discussions via the online course and are encouraged to exchange contact information with other students if they choose to do so. The program strives to create community of e-learners who are interactive and share the learning experience(s) with one another.

Where will my clinical practice education take place?

Each clinical practice course has course objectives so locations may vary depending on the availability of experiences. You will collaborate with the course advisor to find a preceptor that will fit with course objectives and your learning plan. The process of finding a community mentor is part of the community clinical experience.

Your clinical practice experiences are completed with licensed registered nurse (nurse practitioner) preceptors. The clinical location must be approved by the program prior to entering the clinical experiences.

Use of a personal digital assistant (PDA) is strongly recommended for your clinical experience. See FAQs about PDAs for further assistance

When do I participate in the clinical practice education courses?

Clinical practice experiences are completed concurrently with the matching theory course. You have one semester to complete the clinical practice experience.

Where do I write my exams?

An approved test site will be assigned to you when you are registered in program courses.

What completion document do I receive after completing the program?

Upon graduation, you will receive an advanced certificate in Primary Care Nurse Practitioner.

Do I receive a nurse practitioner license at the end of the program?

As a Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association approved educational program for nurse practitioner education, graduates are eligible to write the Canadian Nurse Practitioners examination. After successful completion of that exam, graduates are granted a registered nurse (nurse practitioner) license in Saskatchewan.

What other recognition will I receive after completing the program?

Graduates are credited with 1260 practice hours towards eligibility to maintain registration with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA) if you are a registered nurse in Saskatchewan while taking the program.

What is a PDA?

The term "personal digital assistant" or PDA is a general term for all handheld computers. There are two major types of PDAs distinguished by their operating system. The operating system is what manages all other computer operations (hardware, software, etc.). The two operating systems are either the Palm Operating Systems or the Microsoft Windows Mobile Operating System.

How can a PDA help me in my practice?

Because of mounting health care complexities the use of PDAs can support excellence in practice and save valuable time. The Canadian Nurses Association, 2006, states using enhanced information and communication technology, such as PDAs, gives

“nurses access to timely, evidence- based and expert information, enabling them to make swifter, betterinformed judgments on behalf of their patients. The result is safer patient care and better health outcomes” (p. 10).

For more information related to PDA usage in health care please read the article called “Even Techno-phobic NPs Can Use PDAs found at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hch&AN=21598908&site=ehost-live>

What do I need to know about PDAs?

For an overview of basic PDA information, how they work, what functions they can perform, and some information related to software please go to

<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/553563>. A listing of sites where you can learn about PDAs can be found at Rx files in the miscellaneous tab. <http://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles>

What should I consider before purchasing a PDA?

Price is not as important as getting the right set of PDA features that will meet your needs for the next three years. But please remember that technology changes quickly. Buy a model that meets your needs today, and be aware that there might be a new model available next week. Be sure you consider ease of use. One of the costs of adopting new technology is the time and effort required to learn how to use it. Be sure to ask vendor about a return policy if you are dissatisfied with your purchase.

What software packages should I consider to install on my PDA?

There are numerous software packages available to choose. You must consider your needs and again, ease of use. You may want to consider purchasing and installing a 'clinical suite', which

incorporates software such as a drug guide, drug interaction analysis tool, a medical calculator and a laboratory and diagnostic reference. Installing a 'clinical suite' will ensure compatibility and ease of moving from one area of the program to another. You can find a wealth of resources to make these decisions in the Rx files in the miscellaneous tab.
<http://www.rxfiles.ca/rxfiles>.

You can also access resources from SIAST Libraries & Testing Services. To access these resources, go to the SIAST Libraries Homepage (<http://gosiast.com/libraries>) and click on the **Program Guides** link. This will take you to a full listing of programs offered at SIAST, scroll down and click on the **Primary Care Nurse Practitioner** link. This page contains numerous resources that may be helpful for your studies; databases, e-book, e-journals and websites. Some resources of interest are:

- Lexi-Comp Online – a point-of-care resource of drug information
- CINAHL Plus, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, and Medline Mobile – these are databases that you can access using your PDA or Smart phones.