



NP Peer Review: A Regulatory Assessment for Assuring Patient Safety and Quality of Care



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Introduction



Nurse practitioners (NPs) became a regulated profession in British Columbia, Canada in 2005.

NPs are autonomous, masters or doctorally prepared professionals with a broad scope of practice, which includes clinical activities such as diagnosing diseases and disorders, performing procedures, ordering and interpreting test results and prescribing drugs, including controlled drugs and substances.

Established in 2006, the nurse practitioner peer review (NPPR) is an integral part of BCCNM's Quality Assurance program. NPPR was established recognizing the need to conduct a regulatory assessment measuring the provision of safe, competent and ethical care for this newly introduced profession.

BCCNM and the QA Program

The British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives (BCCNM) is the largest health professions regulator in western Canada. Regulating over 60,000 professionals, BCCNM is the first regulator of both nurses and midwives in Canada. BCCNM's regulatory functions include:

- Establishing the conditions or requirements for registration with BCCNM
- Recognizing education programs and courses in British Columbia for each of the five professions
- Establishing, monitoring, and enforcing standards of practice and professional ethics for nurses and midwives
- Establishing and employing registration, inquiry and discipline procedures that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair
- Promoting and enhancing collaborative relations with other organizations in the health sector, and interprofessional collaborative practice between nurses, midwives, and other health professionals

BCCNM's QA Program sets regulatory quality assurance requirements for nurses and midwives in BC. The program facilitates meeting and exceeding standards through:

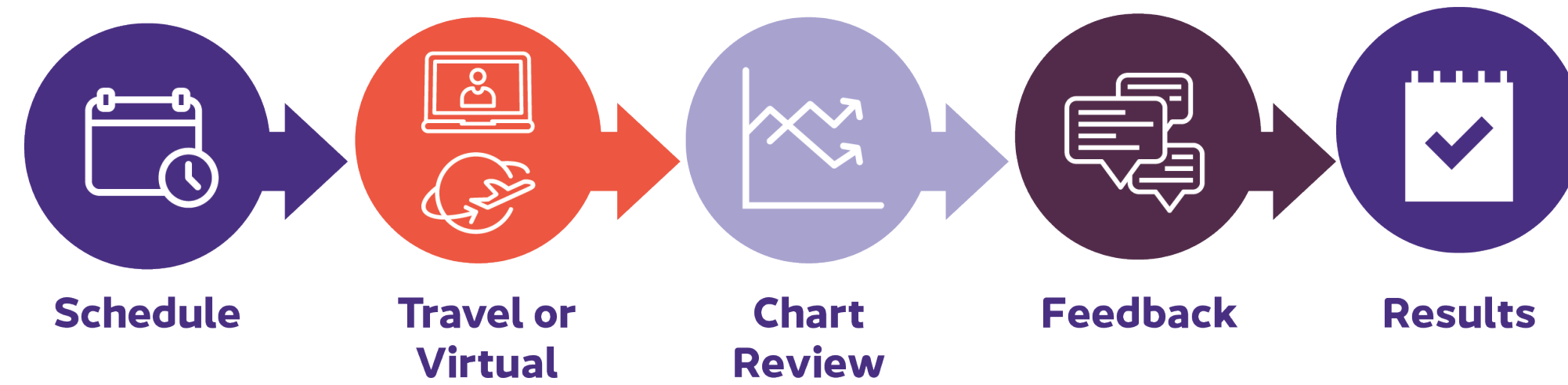
- Participation in self-directed and formalized assessments to identify strengths and areas for practice improvement
- Setting goals for behavioral and technical/clinical development
- Engagement in life-long learning and evaluation of learning on practice

The program is an integral part of ensuring that clients receive safe, competent and ethical care and meeting requirements is one way in which nurses and midwives work to maintain the public's trust in their professions.

What is NP Peer Review?

Traditionally an in-person assessment, NPPR involves a critical review of documentation by an experienced NP Assessor, against regulatory standards and entry-level competencies to assess professional performance.

NPPR is the only regulatory assessment of its kind for NPs in Canada. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the assessment has been adapted to be conducted as either an in-person or virtual assessment.



NP Assessors
NP Assessors are contracted employees who have several years of clinical experience as a NP, as well as a background in teaching, managing and leading nursing professionals.



Chart Review Guidelines
Performance indicators are outlined in the chart review guidelines with a focus on documentation of clinical assessments, diagnosis, management, pharmacotherapy, including controlled drug and substances prescribing and patient safety. Indicators are based on BCCNM's entry-level competencies and standards and scope of practice for NPs.

Critical chart reviews can be a useful method for assessing the professional performance of regulated health professionals. Similar programs have been developed by medical regulatory bodies to assess physician performance. Within British Columbia, several health authorities have also implemented chart review processes that are based on the NPPR model.



Working with System Partners
BCCNM works closely with system partners including health authorities, provincial primary care networks and private clinics to administer the NPPR program. Points of focus include assessor training and access to electronic medical records.



Scheduling and Selection
Selection is completed annually and includes a mix of new and experienced NPs, as well as those deferred in a previous year or requiring a follow-up review. Scheduling occurs throughout the year, accounting for NP and assessor availability, skill matching and conflict of interest.

Evaluation



BCCNM evaluates the program from both a holistic perspective and through ongoing feedback mechanisms. This information is used to continually inform program refinement and development.

Program Evaluation
An evaluation of the NPPR was undertaken in 2021 to assess program outcomes and inform future state planning. The evaluation methodology consisted of a document, data, and literature review, key informant interviews, surveys and logic model development.

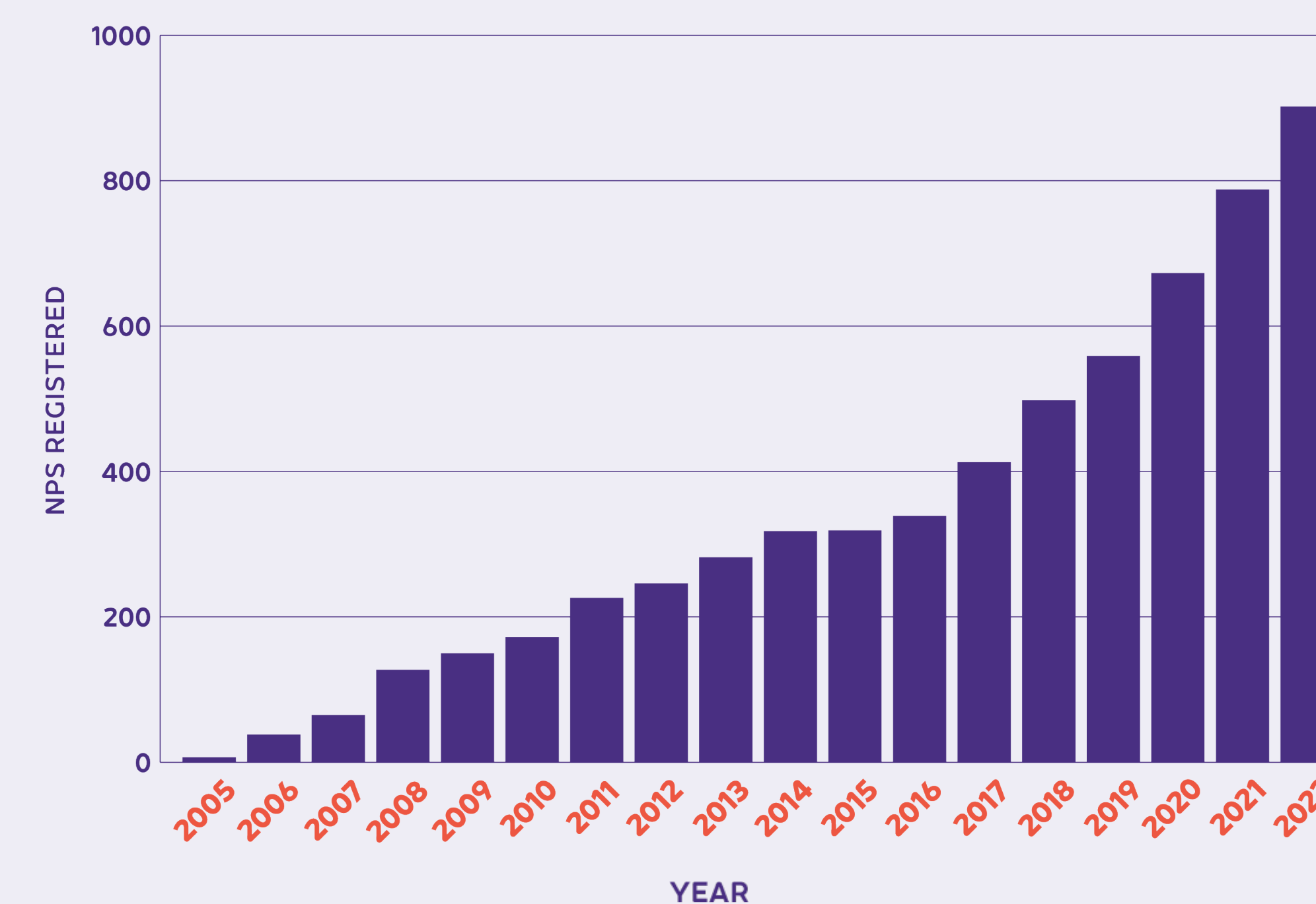
Ongoing NP Feedback
NPs participating in a review are invited to provide feedback via a survey on review completion.

Ongoing Assessor Feedback
Assessors participate in a debrief after each review to evaluate NP outcomes as well as operational and technical areas.

In-person to Virtual Reviews
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the QA program designed, piloted and evaluated the introduction of a virtual review format. Post-pilot evaluation identified virtual reviews as being equivalent in assessment quality, while increasing accessibility and flexibility. In-person reviews are still being conducted however the success of this pilot has led to virtual reviews being the primary method of conducting assessments since 2021.

The NP profession in BC continues to grow year-over-year, requiring ongoing evaluation to ensure assessment scalability and sustainability.

NPs Registered in B.C. by Year



Outcomes and Lessons Learned



Over 600 reviews have been completed since the program's inception, with 92% of NPs meeting expectations; 8% required further assessment to determine if practice expectations have been met.

Between January 2021 (beginning of virtual pilot) and July 2023, 80 reviews were successfully completed using the virtual review format.

Lessons Learned
Participant feedback and review outcomes indicate that NPPR continues to be an effective and valuable method of assessing NP professional performance.

Evaluation findings indicate opportunities to improve scalability and sustainability and address program-level challenges. These include improving usability of the technology platform to conduct assessments, remote access to patient records, streamlining review scheduling, maintaining review selection post COVID-19, and modernizing assessments in keeping with changes in practice and increased focus on equity, diversity and inclusion and cultural safety and humility.



Visit our website to learn more about the NP Peer Review.

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