

Nurse Practitioner MSN Tuition Analysis: A Comparison with Medical School Tuition



Introduction

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are a proven cost-effective answer to improving access to high quality health care. (American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, 2010a, 2010b). This cost-consciousness extends to NP education. The purpose of this project was to identify the cost of Master's (MSN) NP program tuition. A secondary purpose was to compare NP tuition with that of physician tuition. The average tuition for resident NP students to complete the MSN program was \$16,624 at public universities. NP tuition is significantly less than physician tuition, although primary care NPs provide care equivalent to that of primary care physicians. The total tuition cost to prepare a primary care NP is less than one year of medical tuition in either a MD or DO program. (Association of American Medical Colleges, AAMC; American Association of Osteopathic Colleges of Medicine, AAOCM).

Methodology

In November and December of 2009, AANP collected data from university NP program websites to calculate the average tuition cost of a MSN. A list of all universities offering a MSN with a FNP track was compiled from AANP's NP programs listing. AANP focused this purposive sample on FNP programs as 49% of NPs are prepared as FNPs (AANP Database 2009). The tuition cost of the Master's degree was usually calculated by multiplying the number of hours in the program by the 2009-10 tuition cost per hour. If programs designated a range of hours accepted for graduation, AANP used the highest number of hours needed to calculate tuition costs. In some cases, tuition was calculated by multiplying the cost per semester by the number of semesters needed to complete the program, using a plan of study.

Information was collected for a total of 247 programs (99% of FNP programs). Tuition calculations were limited to full-time tuition costs and omitted student fees. Master's programs that were conducted solely online were not included in analyses. For public university tuition, totals were designated as either resident tuition, the tuition an in-state student would pay, or nonresident tuition, the tuition a student living in a different state before the start of the program would pay. Some universities waived tuition for state residents and the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences did not charge tuition at all. Schools were excluded from the cost analysis when they did not charge tuition.

Results

The tuition cost of the MSN in a FNP track averaged \$16,624 for resident students and \$34,308 for nonresident students attending public universities (see Table 1). Tuition costs for resident students ranged from \$2,600 to \$50,254; 90% of programs cost \$28,060 or less. Tuition costs for nonresident students ranged from \$5,040 to \$95,572; 90% of programs cost \$53,190 or less. On average, tuition for nonresident students cost 106% more than tuition for resident students at public universities.

Table 1 MSN Tuition Cost, Complete Program

	<i>Average</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>25th Percentile</i>	<i>75th Percentile</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Public</i>						
Resident	16,624	13,974	2,600 – 50,254	10,034	20,412	141
Nonresident	34,308	32,156	5,040 – 95,572	24,906	43,104	150
<i>Private</i>						
General	34,282	32,400	17,100 – 88,680	25,886	38,184	97

Based on 2009-10 tuition cost per credit hour

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The total tuition of a MSN at a private university averaged \$34,282 (see Table 1). All private universities charged general tuition rates regardless of student residency. When considering the differences in cost between public and private universities in 2009-10, private tuition was slightly more than double the public resident tuition (106% increase). However, the average general tuition cost at private universities was slightly less than nonresident tuition at public universities.

MSN programs averaged 48 hours of course credit in length, although programs ranged from 33 to 80 hours. Half (55%) of the programs required between 44 and 50 hours for graduation. An analysis (described elsewhere) comparing number of credit hours to tuition costs showed a weak but significant relationship between these two variables.

NP Program Cost Comparison with Physician Programs

Many studies have reported that NPs provide equivalent medical care at a lower cost than physicians. Likewise, NP education is offered at a lower tuition cost than physician education.

Based on a survey of 129 of 133 accredited MD-granting schools (AAMC) regarding the 2009-10 tuition cost of the first year of their M.D. program, the average tuition of one year of public medical school was \$3,610 more than the entire MSN tuition cost at a public university. The average tuition of one year of private medical school was \$4,951 more than the entire MSN tuition cost at a private university. The AAMC analysis also excluded the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, which did not charge tuition for its MD program.

Based on data reported by AACOM on 2008-09 tuition of 29 DO-granting programs (100%), AANP calculated the

average tuition cost of the first year of DO-granting programs. Although 2009-10 tuition rates were not yet published, the average tuition of one year of a D.O. program at a public university in 2008-09 was \$4,690 more than the entire MSN tuition cost at a public university in 2009-10. The average 2008-09 tuition of a private university D.O. program 2008-09 was \$2,721 more than the entire MSN tuition cost at a private university in 2009-10.

Summary

This analysis supports the current model of MSN NP preparation as highly cost-effective. In fact, the average total tuition for an NP program at a public institution for a state-resident is approximately 2/3 the cost of one-year of medical school (MD or DO). A more detailed report available from AANP will describe additional findings from the analysis, including discussion related to variation by program geographic location and number of credit hours, as well as a comparison of tuition for online programs. A subsequent analysis of DNP-level NP programs is planned.

References

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- American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine. *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book 2010*. Retrieved January 20, 2010, from <http://www.aacom.org/resources/Pages/2010cib.aspx>
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Table 2 Physician Program Tuition, First Year

	Average	Median	Range	N
MD Tuition, 2009-10				
<i>Public</i>				
Resident	20,234	22,800	0 – 35,582	78
Nonresident	39,875	42,210	12,245 – 71,964	78
<i>Private</i>				
Resident	39,233	42,000	6,550 – 50,320	51
Nonresident	39,775	42,472	0 – 50,488	51
DO Tuition, 2008-09				
<i>Public</i>				
Resident	21,314	22,269	11,053 – 28,462	6
Nonresident	41,995	37,964	26,803 – 63,659	6
<i>Private</i>				
General	37,003	37,509	30,000 – 43,304	18
Resident	31,030	29,030	25,900 – 40,122	5
Nonresident	34,588	35,545	27,250 – 44,643	5

Sources: AAMC & AACOM