By April N. Kapu, DNP, APRN, ACNP-BC, FAANP, FCCM, FAAN

Within all specialties and practice settings, nurse practitioners (NPs) consider social context and social determinants of health (SDoH) as fundamental to accessible, equitable, person-centered care. SDoH are the aspects of one’s life that contribute to knowledge, perspective and engagement in health care. The conditions in which one lives, learns, works or plays are key and impact access to transportation, food, housing, education and safety, as well as many other factors.

The Future of Nursing Report 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity emphasizes the important role of the NP in understanding SDoH, advocating for and assuring health equity and focusing on healthier lives for everyone, everywhere. In the April 2015 issue of The Journal for Nurse Practitioners, Drs. Sandra Davis and Deborah Chapa authored a sentinel article emphasizing the profound impact of SDoH on one’s health and ways health disparities are inextricably linked to SDoH. The 2000s were when health care providers really began to classify and engage in understanding SDoH, advocating for and assuring health equity and focusing on healthier lives for everyone, everywhere. In the April 2015 issue of The Journal for Nurse Practitioners, Drs. Sandra Davis and Deborah Chapa authored a sentinel article emphasizing the profound impact of SDoH on one’s health and ways health disparities are inextricably linked to SDoH. 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Recently, I had the honor of speaking with Dr. Sarah Szanton, dean of the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, on episode 64 of the NP Pulse: The Voice of the Nurse Practitioner podcast. Dr. Szanton shared experiences from throughout her career on better understanding SDoH and the profound impact these factors have on one’s health care. She discussed the importance of integrating SDoH principles throughout NP education within NP practice. I encourage you to listen to this engaging and empowering podcast.

As NPs seek to improve practice and quality in delivering person-centered care, they strive to understand what makes each person unique and how each person might better access and engage in optimal health care. By understanding SDoH, we can create a more equitable health care system and improve health care outcomes. This is what brings value and trust in patient care, and this is what we do best as NPs.

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