

# PA FACTS

## What Is a PA?

A physician assistant is a graduate of an accredited PA educational program who is nationally certified and authorized by the state to practice medicine with the supervision of a licensed physician. PAs are invaluable members of the healthcare team and work in concert with physicians to ensure the highest quality of care for patients.

## To Become a Physician Assistant

### ATTEND AN ACCREDITED PA PROGRAM...

- The typical entering student has a bachelor's degree and approximately four years of healthcare experience.
- The average program takes 27 months to complete.

### ...WITH CLASS/LAB INSTRUCTION

PA students take more than 400 hours in basic sciences (with more than 75 hours in pharmacology) plus approximately 175 hours in behavioral sciences and nearly 580 hours of clinical medicine. Subjects include:

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Anatomy                      | ■ Physical diagnosis     |
| ■ Pathology                    | ■ Differential diagnosis |
| ■ Pharmacology                 | ■ Pathophysiology        |
| ■ Biochemistry                 | ■ Medical ethics         |
| ■ Clinical laboratory sciences | ■ Behavioral sciences    |
| ■ Microbiology                 | ■ Physiology             |

### ...AND CLINICAL ROTATIONS

PAs participate in more than 2,000 hours of clinical rotations, with an emphasis on primary care in ambulatory clinics, physicians' offices and acute/long-term care facilities. Rotations include:

- |                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Family medicine | ■ Emergency medicine    |
| ■ General surgery | ■ Obstetrics/gynecology |
| ■ Pediatrics      | ■ Internal medicine     |
| ■ Psychiatry      |                         |

## To Practice as a Physician Assistant

### INDIVIDUALS MUST

- Pass a national PA certification exam administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (for graduates of accredited PA programs only).
- Obtain a state license

## To Maintain Certification

### PA's MUST

- Complete 100 hours of continuing medical education over a two-year cycle.
- Pass a recertification exam every six years.



## Where Do PAs Practice?

More than 90,000 certified physician assistants work in virtually every medical and surgical setting across the country. More than one-third (39.4 percent) practice in hospital settings and close to 40 percent work in a group practice or solo physician office. The remaining PAs work in a variety of settings, including community health centers, freestanding surgical facilities, nursing homes, school- or college-based facilities, industrial settings and correctional institutions.

## What Can a PA Legally Do?

Physicians may delegate to PAs medical duties that are within the physician's scope of practice, the PA's training and experience and that are allowed by law.

These duties include performing physical examinations, diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering and interpreting lab tests, assisting in surgery, providing patient education and counseling, and making rounds in nursing homes and hospitals. All states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands authorize physicians to delegate prescriptive privileges to the PAs they supervise.

## Why Was the Profession Created?

Recognizing that some residents of North Carolina had limited access to quality medical care, the chair of the Department of Medicine at the Duke University Medical Center established a program in 1965 to educate ex-military corpsmen to practice medicine with physician supervision. The educational model for PAs was based in part on his experience with the fast-track training of doctors during World War II. These first students had received extensive healthcare training during their military careers.

## What About Reimbursement for Services Provided by PAs?

PAs offer great value to their employers by providing high quality medical and surgical care to patients for which most public and private third party payers reimburse. Services provided by PAs are billed under the PA's name or under the name of the supervising physician, depending on the policies of the individual payer. Most federal and state healthcare reform initiatives recognize and include PAs as vital members of the healthcare team.

## And the Quality of PA Care?

Numerous studies have found that the quality of care that PAs provide is comparable to that of physicians. The congressional Office of Technology Assessment studied healthcare services provided by PAs and determined that "physician assistants provide health care that is indistinguishable in quality from care provided by physicians." Additionally, according to a study published in *The American Surgeon* in 2004, PAs "are a valuable adjunct in improving quality of patient care." And PAs provide quality of care comparable to physicians according to a 2009 Rand Report that confirmed the conclusions of two reviews of published studies. A nationwide study published in 2005 also found that, regardless of provider, Medicare patients are generally satisfied with the quality of health care they receive.

### PA WORK SETTINGS

Source: AAPA 2010 Annual PA Census

Specialty Physician Groups	29.2%
Solo Physician Practices	11%
Other	10.1%
Certified Rural Health Clinics	2.7%
Federally Qualified and Community Health Centers	5.2%

### PAs WORK IN VIRTUALLY EVERY AREA OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY

Source: AAPA 2010 Annual PA Census

General Surgery & Surgical Subspecialties	25.9%
Family Medicine	24.3%
Other	15.7%
General Internal Medicine & IM Subspecialties	15.1%
Emergency Medicine	10.9%
General Pediatrics & Pediatric Subspecialties	3.7%
Ob/Gyn	2.0%
Occupational Medicine	1.9%

