

PA FACTS

What Is a PA?

A physician assistant (PA) is a graduate of an accredited PA educational program who is nationally certified and state-licensed to practice medicine. PAs are invaluable members of the healthcare team and work in concert with physicians to ensure the highest quality of care for patients. PAs obtain medical histories, diagnose and treat illnesses, write prescriptions, perform physical examinations, order and interpret lab tests, perform procedures, assist in surgery, provide patient education and counseling and make rounds in hospitals and nursing homes.

To Become a PA

ATTEND AN ACCREDITED PA PROGRAM

- The typical student has a bachelor's degree and approximately four years of healthcare experience.
- The average program takes 26 months to complete. Nearly all award master's degrees.
- More than 7,000 PAs graduate from 190 accredited PA programs each year.

...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
- Pathology
- Pharmacology
- Biochemistry
- Clinical laboratory sciences
- Microbiology
- Physical diagnosis
- Differential diagnosis
- Pathophysiology
- Medical ethics
- Behavioral sciences
- 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
- General surgery
- Pediatrics
- Psychiatry
- Emergency medicine
- Obstetrics/gynecology
- Internal medicine

To Practice as a PA

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

PAs MUST

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



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 physicians. 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 medical training during their military careers.

PA Areas of Practice

More than 100,000 certified PAs work in virtually every medical and surgical setting across the country. Nearly one third of PAs practice in primary care, the largest segment of which is family medicine, and one third practice in hospital settings. 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.

PA SPECIALTIES	
Source: AAPA PAs in Healthcare Annual Survey 2013	
General Surgery & Surgical Subspecialties	26%
Family Medicine	23.2%
Other	18.4%
General Internal Medicine & IM Subspecialties	14.8%
Emergency Medicine	10.6%
General Pediatrics & Pediatric Subspecialties	3.4%
OB/Gyn	2.0%
Occupational Medicine	1.5%

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. PAs prescribe medication in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and all U.S. territories, with the exception of Puerto Rico.

A Typical PA

Every year the typical PA treats 3,500 patients and writes 2,600 to 5,200 prescriptions. According to the AAPA's 2013 annual survey of the PA profession, the top procedures performed by PAs include: writing prescriptions (82%), acute care management (80%), chronic disease management (64%), follow-up patient calls (63%), care coordination (58%), clinical consultations (55%), and minor surgical procedures (52%). And PAs enjoy what they do - 86% of PAs report they are satisfied or highly satisfied with their jobs, compared with 39% of physicians. The median salary (not including bonus) of PAs in 2013 is \$90,000.

Reimbursement for 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 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. Medicare-covered services provided by PAs are reimbursed at 85 percent of the physician billing rate.

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 healthcare that is indistinguishable in quality from care provided by physicians." 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.

