

# PA<sub>s</sub> PRACTICE MEDICINE

## WHAT IS A PA?

A PA is a medical provider who is nationally certified and state licensed to practice medicine. Today there are more than 100,000 certified PAs in the United States.

## WHAT DO PA<sub>s</sub> DO?

PA<sub>s</sub> practice medicine.

PA<sub>s</sub> are nationally certified and licensed, most often by state medical boards, to practice medicine and are authorized to prescribe medication in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and all U.S. territories, with the exception of Puerto Rico.

PA<sub>s</sub> can obtain medical histories, conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, perform medical procedures like joint injections, counsel patients on preventive healthcare, assist in surgery, write prescriptions, and make rounds in nursing homes and hospitals, among many other medical services.



PA<sub>s</sub> practice medicine in every specialty and setting.

## WHERE DO PA<sub>s</sub> PRACTICE?

- Roughly one-third of PA<sub>s</sub> practice in primary care, and all other PA<sub>s</sub> practice in specialty medicine.
- More than one-third (37.5 percent) of all PA<sub>s</sub> practice in hospital settings and more than one-third (38.1) percent work in a group practice or solo physician office. The remaining PA<sub>s</sub> 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.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest single employer of PA<sub>s</sub>.
- Thirty-seven percent of PA<sub>s</sub> work in medically underserved counties, which helps increase access to quality care.

## HOW ARE PA<sub>s</sub> EDUCATED?

- More than 7,000 PA<sub>s</sub> graduate from 191 accredited PA programs each year.
- PA<sub>s</sub> are educated to diagnose, treat and prescribe in an intense graduate program similar to medical school.
- PA<sub>s</sub> are often educated alongside physicians in medical schools, academic medical centers and residencies because their education is modeled on the medical school curriculum, with a combination of classroom instruction and clinical rotations. That means PA<sub>s</sub> share diagnostic and therapeutic reasoning with physicians.
- After a year of classroom study, PA<sub>s</sub> complete a minimum of 2,000 hours of clinical rotations with an emphasis on primary care clinics, physicians' offices and acute/long-term care facilities.

## TO BECOME A PA, PA<sub>s</sub> MUST:

Attend an accredited PA program ...

- The typical entering student has a bachelor's degree and approximately four years of healthcare experience.
- The average graduate program takes 26 months to complete. Nearly all award master's degrees.

... with class and lab instruction and clinical rotations.

- PA students take more than 75 hours in pharmacology, 175 hours in behavioral sciences, more than 400 hours in basic sciences and nearly 580 hours of clinical medicine.
- PA students complete a minimum of 2,000 hours of clinical rotations.

## TO PRACTICE AS A PA, PAs MUST:

- Graduate from an accredited program and pass the national PA certifying exam administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants.
- Obtain a state license.
- Complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years.
- Recertify every 10 years through an exam that evaluates generalist medical knowledge. PAs recertify as generalists, not specialists.

## WHY WERE PAs CREATED?

PAs have been practicing medicine for nearly 50 years. The PA profession was created to address a shortage of quality medical providers in the 1960s. The chair of the Department of Medicine at the Duke University Medical Center established a program in 1965 that educated military corpsmen to practice medicine. The first PAs graduated from Duke University in 1967.

## 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. While PAs always work with physicians in a team approach to healthcare, services provided by PAs are billed under the PA's name, depending on policies of the individual payer. A physician does not necessarily need to be on site or see the patient, as the PA can provide many services that physicians do.

## AND THE QUALITY OF PA CARE?

Studies identify high-quality care with physician-PA teams and have shown that the quality of care provided by PAs is comparable to that of physicians, that PAs enhance care coordination, and that practices relying on PAs are more cost-effective than those without PAs. PAs are proven to create access, elevate health outcomes and increase patient satisfaction.

### TOP SPECIALTIES


Primary Care	32.1%
Surgical Subspecialties	26.6%
Other Specialties	18.6%
Emergency Medicine	10.8%
Internal Medicine Subspecialties	10.2%


### TOP 5 STATES

New York	7.3%
Texas	6.9%
California	6.4%
Pennsylvania	5.8%
North Carolina	5.3%

Source: AAPA 2013 Annual Survey


## VITAL STATISTICS


**50**   
states and the District of Columbia authorize PAs prescribing privileges.


**1967**   
was the year the first three PAs graduated from Duke University.

**More than 100,000**   
certified PAs are in the U.S. today, according to the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants.

**\$90,000**   
was the median annual salary for a PA in 2013.


**3,500**   
patients are seen annually by a typical PA.

**2,600-5,200**   
prescriptions are written by a typical PA annually.

**191**   
accredited PA programs operate nationwide, according to Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.

## PRIMARY EMPLOYER

 Physician (Solo or Group Practice) **60.4%**

 Hospital (University or Other) **32.1%**

 Military Branch **2.6%**

 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs **1.8%**