

HOSA Clinical Specialty

Physician Assistant

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Physician Assistant Career Summary

What is a Physician Assistant?

Physician assistants are highly skilled licensed clinicians who diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, serve as a patient's principal healthcare professional, and practice medicine under the ultimate supervision of a licensed physician.

- ★ As an estimate, PAs can independently perform about 80% of the work a licensed physician can do.
- ★ Physician assistants are versatile and practice medicine in all healthcare specialties.
- ★ A PA's generalist medical training and education enables them to provide a wide spectrum of patient care emphasizing patient education, preventive care, and chronic care management.

Job Duties, specialties, and opportunities

- Primary Care: conduct physical exams, provide ongoing care, and treat common illnesses
- Surgery: act as first assistant in surgery, perform minor surgical procedures, execute post-operative care, and conduct discharge planning
- Emergency Medicine: perform emergency procedures such as sutures, treating wounds, infections, sprains/strains, and starting central IV lines
- Orthopedics: reduce dislocated bones, make and remove casts, and perform imaging procedures

- Psychiatry: assess and diagnose patients experiencing mental distress or mental disorders, prescribe medications
- Hospital Care: Evaluate and treat admitted patients who require close monitoring or extensive care.

Duties of the PA may be limited by the supervising physician or state law, but the above list provides a general overview of the basic tasks and duties performed by a physician assistant. Certain specialties and subspecialties may alter the duties and responsibilities of the PA as well.

Employment Characteristics

Physician assistants may practice in every healthcare setting, including hospitals, urgent care centers, outpatient offices, correctional institutions, and clinics. Over half (54%) of PAs in the U.S. work in outpatient offices or clinics (AAPA Salary Survey, 2020). Many physician assistants also work for federal government agencies and serve in the nation's uniformed services, including the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security.

Although the PA profession is well established, highly trusted, and essential to the U.S. health care workforce, they are committed to team practice with a physician. Oftentimes, they will examine, diagnose, and treat patients under a collaboration agreement with a physician, who may or may not be on-site. The supervising physician is available to the PA as needed or as required by state law if a collaborative agreement is established and the PA is working independently at a healthcare facility.

Education, Training, and Credentialing

Aspiring physician assistants must begin their undergraduate education with at least an associate's or bachelor's degree and completion of prerequisite courses in basic and behavioral sciences before applying to an accredited PA program. Although there is variation among programs, most admission is highly competitive and requires an average of 2,000-3,000 hours of direct patient contact experience, having worked as a paramedic, athletic trainer, nurse, medical assistant, etc.

PA programs are 2-3 academic years of both didactic and clinical education training modeled on the medical school curriculum. Students will complete the program educated at a Master's degree level and experienced with 2,000 hours of clinical rotations. Many students attend a postgraduate residency program, usually based on their specialty interests, which enables them to expand their skills, knowledge, and experience in a specialized position and provides them with more professional opportunities. To obtain a license, PAs must pass a certification exam, maintainable through a recertification exam every ten years and by completing 100 hours of continued medical education (CME) every two years.

Physician Assistant Professional Associations

The PA career is supported by national medical groups including The American Medical Association, American College of Surgeons, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American College of Emergency Physicians; however, it is promoted by many professional organizations on both national and local levels. These associations provide

accredited certification programs that reflect standards for clinical knowledge, clinical reasoning, and other medical skills required upon entry into a PA practice.

➤ **Recognized PA Professional Associations:**

- The National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA)
- The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the PA (ARC-PA)

Career-related Data and Statistics Information

According to the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, there are 260 PA programs in the United States. The Bureau of Labor statistics showed that the physician assistant career is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the country with a predicted growth of 37% within the next decade. Experts expect a large shortage of primary care physicians, resulting in many opportunities for PAs in medicine and surgery over the next 10-15 years. Since PAs are educated as generalists, they are presented with many opportunities of employment.

Median Annual Wage: \$112,260 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019)

Lowest 10 percent: less than \$72,720 **Highest 10 percent:** greater than \$157,120

Factors that affect salaries for a PA include:

→ Experience → Facility → Geographical Area → Choice of Specialty

Most PAs work full time, including nights, weekends, and holidays. Some may work more than 40 hours per week, and on call duties may require them to respond to work requests with little notice. Although demanding, the PA profession ranks #1 on both the Best Healthcare Jobs List and the Best 100 Jobs List (US News & World Report, 2021).

Professional Interview Summary

Anna Fuka is a certified physician assistant (PA-C) who has practiced family medicine at the Sanford Health Enderlin Clinic in Enderlin, North Dakota for three and a half years. She attended Valley City State University in Valley City, North Dakota for undergraduate studies in exercise science and finished her four year degree and prerequisite courses at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. After graduating from Midwestern University Arizona of Osteopathic Medicine in Glendale, Arizona where she received a master's degree in PA studies (MPAS), Anna became a certified PA by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. She treats a variety of conditions, offers chronic disease management, and provides walk-in care for patients and families in rural North Dakota.

In my interview with Anna, she was able to offer valuable insight on a PA's work environment and job duties, her personal experience in achieving her career goals, her role in the rural and overall healthcare system, how a physician assistant compares to other healthcare related careers, and advice to students, like myself, aspiring to become a physician assistant. Anna described the personal benefits she has obtained from choosing this career path instead of pursuing medical school. She estimated that about 90% of those in her profession share similar feelings of satisfaction with their career decision, having chosen the PA route over a more arduous, expensive, and elongated medical career.

Anna explained that her role as a PA in the healthcare system is to act as a "filter" for her patients. She described a typical work day in which she begins seeing

patients from around the area at 7am. Because the closest physician is approximately forty miles away and the PA education and scope of practice is very broad, Anna sees many different patients seeking various forms of care. From family medicine to emergency care, she independently performs many tasks and skills in the clinical setting including prescribing medication, dermatology consultations, prenatal and postnatal care, conducting x-rays, labs, and EKGs, sutures, intravenous therapy, nursing home rounds, treating bone fractures, and more. She provides her patients with thorough care and refers them to specialists if necessary. Anna is the primary healthcare provider at the clinic, and consults with a licensed physician once a month to discuss patient care, questions, or concerns. This is different from many of her colleagues who have specialized in areas such as surgery and work much more closely with a licensed physician.

As a future nursing student, I asked Anna to explain how a nurse practitioner compares to a PA. She described the difference in the educational backgrounds of the nursing model versus the medical model, and how the PA profession provides her with more opportunities to provide general patient care than the NP. Finally, Anna offered her advice regarding the PA program and tips to better prepare for this chosen profession. She suggested choosing my top five to ten schools and finding the prerequisite courses that are required for each program. To avoid additional stress during PA school, she advised that I start logging volunteer and job shadowing hours early in my educational journey in order to build an effective resume and gain experience in the medical field.

Clinical Specialty: Physician Assistant**Intravenous Administration Skill Checklist**

Competitor #: _____ Judge's Signature _____

Reference: *Advanced Emergency Care and Transportation of the Sick and Injured*

Pollak, A. N., & Beck, R. J. (Eds.)

2012 Jones & Bartlett Learning, LCC Page number: 270-272

Intravenous Administration	JUDGE USE ONLY: Comments
1. Fill drip chamber by squeezing it together	
2. Flush the tubing to remove air bubbles by opening the roller clamp	
3. Tear tape prior to venipuncture or have commercial device available	
4. Apply gloves prior to contact with patient & palpate a suitable vein	
5. Apply the constricting band above the intended IV site	
6. Clean the area using an aseptic technique. Use an alcohol pad to cleanse in a circular motion from the inside out. Use a second alcohol pad to wipe straight down the center.	
7. Choose the appropriate-size catheter; twist the catheter to break the seal. Examine the catheter for any imperfections.	
8. Insert the catheter at approximately 45 degrees with the bevel up while applying distal traction with the other hand.	
9. Observe for "flashback" as blood enters the catheter	
10. Occlude the catheter to prevent blood leaking while removing the stylet	
11. Immediately dispose of all sharps in the proper container	
12. Attach the prepared IV line	
13. Remove the constricting band	

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14. Open IV line to ensure fluid is flowing and the line is patent. Observe for any swelling or infiltration around the IV site	
15. Secure the catheter with tape or a commercial device.	
16. Secure IV tubing and adjust the flow rate while monitoring the patient	

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