

Healthcare Practitioners and Technicians

Physician Assistants

Physician Assistants (PA's) practice medicine under the supervision of a medical doctor (MD). They are trained to take medical histories, order and interpret laboratory and medical tests, diagnose and treat patients, provide preventative healthcare, write prescriptions, and counsel and instruct patients. All of these tasks are done under the supervision of a licensed physician and the level of autonomy (being able to work and make decisions alone) depends upon the supervising physician and medical setting.

Physician Assistants have the ability to specialize in specific areas of medicine. Some of the areas of specialization include: general internal medicine, pediatrics, surgery, oncology, anesthesia, obstetrics and gynecology, gerontology, neurology, and psychiatry.

The working environment of a Physician Assistant varies by the setting that they are working in. Typically they work in comfortable, well lit environments, and often engage in considerable amounts of walking. Long periods of standing are often seen in the surgical setting. The hours a Physician Assistant works varies according to the practice setting and the hours of the supervising physician. In a hospital setting they may work nights, weekends, and during the holidays. Those in clinics usually work 40 hours per week.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

In order to become a Physician Assistant one must attend a training program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). Requirements for admission into a program vary by school, but typically one must:

- Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and
- Have some experience in the healthcare field.

Most PA programs require two years of fulltime study leading to a Master's of Science (MS) in Physician Assistant Studies.

Within 180 days of graduating from a Physician Assistant program the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) needs to be taken in order to be certified to practice. This test is required by all 50 states and the District of Columbia to practice. To maintain licensure a Physician Assistant must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every 2 years and take the Physician Assistant National

Recertification Exam (PANRE) every 6 years. Only those who are graduated from accredited programs may take the PANCE.

Physician Assistants can go on to specialize in specific areas of medicine. Some of the areas that they can specialize in include: general internal medicine, pediatrics, surgery, oncology, anesthesia, obstetrics and gynecology, gerontology, neurology, and psychiatry. Training in these specialties is usually obtained through residencies (on-the-job training for that particular specialty) although some are available through master's degree programs.

More Information on Certification:

- American Academy of Physician Assistants Specialties:
<http://www.aapa.org/partners/constituent-organizations/specialty>
- American Academy of Physician Assistants:
<http://www.aapa.org/index.php>
- National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants:
<http://www.nccpa.net/>
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant:
<http://www.arc-pa.org/>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree earned at an accredited public university in Physician Assistant studies costs an average of \$16,700* per year. Completion time is generally two years.

Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE): \$475, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

Physician Assistant National Recertification Exam (PANRE): \$350, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

Costs of continuing education vary.

* Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.