SO, YOU WANT TO BE A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT?

Check out the American Academy of Physician Assistant (www.aapa.org) for more information on the career. And the Physician Assistant Education Association (www.paeaonline.org) to learn about accredited PA programs.

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**Quick Facts: Physician Assistants**

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<tr>
<td>2010 Median Pay</td>
<td>$86,410 per year</td>
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<td>$41.54 per hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entry-Level Education</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Experience in a Related Occupation</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>On-the-job Training</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Number of Jobs, 2010</td>
<td>83,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Outlook, 2010-20</td>
<td>30% (Much faster than average)</td>
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<td>Employment Change, 2010-20</td>
<td>24,700</td>
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**WHAT DOES A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT DO?**

- PAs are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision.
- PAs are educated in the medical model designed to complement physician training. They are representatives of the physician, treating the patient in the style and manner developed and directed by the supervising physician.
- PAs share the responsibility for care of patients with physicians.
- PAs practice in all areas of medicine: primary care (including family, internal, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology), surgery, and surgical specialties.
- Forty-seven states, the District of Columbia and Guam have enacted laws that authorize a PA to prescribe medications (Indiana, Louisiana and Ohio do not yet authorize prescribing by PAs).

**HOW DID THE PROFESSION GET STARTED?**

The PA profession emerged in the mid-1960s to alleviate a problem of physician maldistribution and to increase the public’s access to quality health care. The first PA educational program was started at Duke University in North Carolina. The first PAs were former medical corpmen who wanted to use their medical skills in civilian life.

**PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CAREER OPTIONS**

In addition to the many geographic choices available to a physician assistant (PAs are licensed in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands), there are a variety of settings or types of practices from which to choose:

- **Private Practice**: More than half of all physician assistants are in private clinical practice.
• **Hospitals**: Roughly 24% of physician assistants practice in general medical and surgical hospitals, public and private.
• **HMOs**: The majority of PAs employed with Health Management Organizations work in family practice, pediatrics and internal medicine and generally provide primary care.
• **Uniformed Services and other Federal Government agencies**: PAs serve in all seven branches of the U.S. Uniformed Services as well as other Federal Government agencies, including Veteran’s Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Justice.

**HOW CAN YOU BE A STRONG CANDIDATE FOR PA SCHOOL?**

Given the heightened competition, it's important for applicants to understand what matters most to PA admissions committees. These three top the list, according to officials at PA schools:

1. **Medical experience**: Your life working in the medical field will not begin once you've graduated from a PA program; it should start well before that. For students hoping to jump directly from their undergraduate studies to a physician assistant program, it is imperative that they spend as many college summers as possible, or use their free time during school, working or volunteering at a hospital or doctor's office. For those students who wish to wait to attend PA school—the average age of people entering PA programs nationwide is 27—find a full-time job working in the medical field after earning your undergraduate degree.

2. **Science classes count most**: Take as many core science classes—anatomy, biological sciences, and organic chemistry, to name a few—as you can and focus intensely on this coursework. PA programs not only look at your overall GPA—many schools require at least a 3.0 for admission—but give extra weight to your performance in science courses.

3. **Show compassion**: Your GPA is stellar and you've amassed an impressive amount of medical work experience in the little spare time you have while keeping your grades pristine, but you still get that dreaded rejection letter. Why? You didn't do enough volunteer work. Volunteering exemplifies your desire to help your fellow man—the attribute identified by schools as one of the most integral to becoming a successful PA.

**ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR APPLYING TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCHOOL**

To enter a physician assistant program, one must first complete three to four years of college credit at an accredited institution. The majority of students who enter a physician assistant program have a bachelor’s degree and some have completed graduate study.

There is no particular major required for physician assistant school, just the prerequisite of certain science classes. You should check the specific admissions requirements for your schools of interest; however, some typical prerequisite courses include:

• Biology with lab (8 credits)
• Microbiology with lab (4 credits)
• Chemistry with lab (8 credits)
• Organic chemistry with lab (3-4 credits)
• Biochemistry with lab (3-4 credits)
• Human anatomy and physiology with lab (8 credits)
• Psychology (3 credits)
• English (3-6 credits)
• Humanities and social science classes (3-6 credits)

THE APPLICATION

There are four major steps in the application process:

• Taking the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) – however, some colleges will accept the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) and some also require the biology subject test in addition to the GRE.
• Completing the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) form for the U.S. schools that participate in CASPA or individual school applications for non-participating institutions.
• Submitting supplemental materials such as letters of evaluation and academic transcripts.
• Managing the timing of the application process.

Submit the following application materials directly to CASPA:

• CASPA application (submitted electronically).
• Application fee.
• Three completed evaluations using official CASPA form in paper or electronic formats.
• Supplemental application, if required by the designated CASPA, and any associated fees.
• College transcripts.
• Standardized test scores.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT RESOURCES

A number of sites offer information about careers as a physician assistant, preparing for admission and financial aid for physician assistant students.

• American Academy of Physician Assistants http://www.aapa.org/
• Physician Assistant Education Association http://www.paeaonline.org/
• U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources - Health Resources and Services Administration www.hrsa.gov

Still wondering...now what?
Stop by Career Services in 511 Goodell for a 15-minute walk-in with a Peer Advisor. They can help you navigate your job search, review your resume, or prepare for an interview. Or, call Career Services to schedule a one-hour appointment with your Career Advisor.
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- Central Application Services for Physician Assistants (CASPA) https://portal.caspaonline.org/
- Graduate Record Exam (GRE) http://www.ets.org/gre/
- Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/