

THE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CAREER: A HAND BOOK FOR STUDENTS

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Lee Honors College: Undergraduate Senior Thesis

REASON FOR THESIS TOPIC

- Currently a Pre-Physician assistant student
- Based on my experience as a Pre-PA student I would have appreciated such an extensive resource to make undergrad a little less difficult
- I am a proud PA advocate and would like to get the word out to students who do not know much about it
- Great opportunity to educate myself more PA profession

MAIN SECTIONS

- What a PA is
 - Comparison with other professions
 - History of the PA profession
 - Admissions
 - Training and education of a PA student
 - Various specialties
 - Salary information
 - Certification maintenance education information
 - Resource page
 - Four interviews from a PA in a different specialty
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WHAT IS A PA?

- A physician assistant (PA) is an interdependent semi autonomous clinician practicing medicine collaboratively with a physician
 - examination, diagnosis, assisting in surgery, diagnostic testing, setting fractures, treatment (including referral), counseling patients in preventative health care and writing prescriptions.
 - Median salary \$90,000
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WHAT IS A PA?

- Job Satisfaction is extremely high
 - High demand
 - Generalist model of training allows for greater flexibility to change specialties
 - Allows for the physician to have a colleague close at hand
 - Alleviates workload on medical team
 - Improve access to healthcare
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PROFESSION COMPARISON:

- Nurse Practitioner
 - Similar roles, often work together in medical team
 - Both diagnose, treat, prescribe medications and educate patients
- Medical Assistant
 - MA assumes both administrative and clinical duties
 - Answering telephones to prepping patients for exams
 - 1-2 year educational pathway
- Nurse
 - Nurses typically provide bedside care and pass meds but can not prescribe

HISTORY

- 1960's-shortage of medically trained personal identified by surgeon general
- Dr. Eugene Stead Jr. proposed PA curriculum to reduce shortage
- Approved and in 1967 first PA class graduated from Duke University



ADMISSIONS

- Ideal candidate
 - Experience-direct patient care
 - Personable
 - Good academic standing
 - Maturity
 - Understanding of PA profession
 - Leadership experience
 - Dedicated to cultural diversity
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ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- Some schools require patient hours
 - Two years college courses in basic sciences/behavioral sciences.
 - CASPA requires
 - 3 letters of recommendations
 - Personal narrative
 - Some schools require GRE
 - Official transcripts
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TRAINING AND EDUCATION

- PA school generally 24-27 months long
 - First year didactic year spent in classroom
 - Second year clinical rotations
 - Common rotations include: family medicine, internal medicine, OB/GYN, pediatrics, general surgery, emergency medicine and psychiatry
 - Program must be accredited by ARC to become licensed in the US
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METHODS OF TEACHING

- Lecture-based learning is most common
 - Problem-based learning (PBL) -Facilitators play minimal role, discussion is not guided
 - Students presented a case study, expected to define problem, explore related issues and come up with problem resolution
 - Organ-based approach
 - Takes a system and integrates physiology, anatomy, biochemistry, microbiology, pharmacology and more
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SPECIALTIES

- Over 60 different specialties
 - Thesis focuses on five specialties:
 - Emergency medicine
 - Surgery
 - Obstetrics and gynecology
 - Internal medicine
 - Dermatology
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EMERGENCY MEDICINE

- May work in critical care, urgent care, observation units, chest pain centers and trauma centers
 - See a wide range of patients
 - Therapeutic procedures include arthrocentesis, debridement of burns, lumbar puncture, interosseous needle placement and more
 - Fast paced
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SURGERY

- Sample of work environments: perioperative, intraoperative, post anesthesia care unit, surgical intensive care unit, step down unit, outpatient clinic
 - Generally involved with abdominal procedures
 - Surgical residencies available but not required
 - Some duties include performing minor surgical procedures, rendering emergency care, conducting research, and prescribing medication
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OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY (OB/GYN)

- Frequently encounter pap/pelvic and breast exams, gynecological complaints, family planning, menopause management and prenatal care
 - Most common procedures performed include ultrasound, colposcopy and endometrial biopsy
 - Many state laws do not address PAs and deliveries for unknown reasons
 - Abortions: many states have physician only laws
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INTERNAL MEDICINE

- Focus on treating patients who suffer from diseases effecting internal organs
 - 17.2% of practicing PAs work in internal medicine
 - Therapeutic procedures include obtaining blood gases, performing lumbar punctures, starting IV's, drawing blood, central line placement, etc.
 - Work in hospitals, group clinics, physician practices
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DERMATOLOGY

- Trained on the job typically
 - Two residency programs for Dermatological PAs
 - May specialize in certain subspecialties such as acne, psoriasis, phototherapy, HIV, cosmetics or surgery
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SALARY INFORMATION

- Dependent on PA scope of practice such as specialty, level of experience and environment
- American Academy of Physician Assistant census from Oct 2010-April 2011 reported:
 - Median salary for primary care PA: \$85,000
 - Emergency medicine PA: \$100,000
 - General surgery PA: \$92,000
 - Surgery subspecialty PA: \$97,000
 - Internal subspecialty PA: \$87,200
 - Pediatric subspecialty PA: \$88,000

CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE EDUCATION

- Consists of clinical and professional education acts that maintain, develop or increase knowledge, skills and professional performance and relationships that a PA uses to provide service for patients, the public and the profession
 - Have to have a certain number of CME credits per two year period
 - Random audit process of credits to strengthen value of profession
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INTERVIEWS

- Conducted four interviews from PAs representing four different specialties
 - Asked a wide range of questions to get an overall idea of what it is like in their specialty
 - Who better to hear about the profession than the PAs themselves?
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CONCLUSION

- These were the main points of the thesis
 - The document can be used as a useful tool for students who wish to learn more about the profession
 - I learned a great deal more in just about every section
 - Questions?
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