

What you need to know about becoming a **Physician Assistant (PA)**

Physician assistants (PAs) provide diagnostic, therapeutic and preventive health care services under the supervision of a physician. Although PAs practice under the guidance of doctors, they are often the primary health care provider for patients. PAs are known for working in underserved and rural populations where MD/DO physicians are often in short supply. PAs enable patients to have more consistent and effective health care in these areas.

Where do they work?

PAs are found in a variety of health care settings. They work in private practice and hospital settings. PAs can specialize in things like

- Internal medicine
- Geriatrics
- Pediatrics
- Family medicine
- Surgery
- Orthopedics
- Emergency medicine

Physician assistant students complete two years of graduate study to earn a master's degree after completing their undergraduate degree. The first year of the program is typically dedicated to coursework covering topics such as biochemistry, pharmacology, medical ethics, and anatomy and physiology. Clinical rotations are completed in the areas of emergency medicine, gynecology, family medicine, internal medicine, surgery, geriatrics and pediatrics. Graduates of accredited PA programs may continue their education in a specialty if desired. All states require PAs to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam. PAs also are required to participate in continuing education to maintain their licenses.

Education

Entrance to PA schools is competitive.

Academic requirements include

- Biology (BIO 105 and 106)
- General Chemistry (CHE 110 and 111)
- Anatomy and Physiology (BIO 245 and 345)
- English (ENG 110)
- Math (MAT 190 and 150)
- Psychology (PSY 105 and 250)

Recommended courses include

- Microbiology (BIO 232)
- Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry (CHE 210 and 310)

Accepted Student Profile

Students accepted into physician assistant programs typically have

- High GPAs
- Excellent scores on GREs
- Documented hours of patient contact (variable amount depending on program)
- Leadership experience
- CPR certification
- Experience shadowing a practicing PA

Application

Physician assistant schools use the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). All official transcripts and letters of recommendation will be submitted through this service.

PA schools typically require students to take the GRE (Graduate Records Examination). The exam consists of verbal, quantitative reasoning and writing section..

Web Resources

Physician Assistant Education Association: www.paeaonline.org

American Physician Assistant Association: aapa.org

CASPA Application: portal.caspaonline.org

GRE: www.ets.org/gre/