

WHAT IS A PA?

Physician assistants are certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) – a mark of professional accomplishment – and state-licensed. They are health professionals who practice medicine as members of a team with their supervising physicians. PAs deliver a broad range of medical and surgical services to diverse populations in rural and urban settings. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and prescribe medications.



NUMBERS

- 74,000 PAs today (compared to 20,000 in 1981)
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the number of PAs to increase by 27% in the next seven years
- 257,835,068 visits to PAs in 2008

332 million medications were prescribed or recommended by PAs in 2008



IMPACT

The role of the PA is had a tremendous impact on health care, especially at a time when numerous Americans are uninsured. The greatest areas of impact are in rural health care and urban underserved areas where provider shortages are most severe.

- Each year the PA workforce grows providing an increased number of health care providers for America's growing number of patients.

Patients benefit since they typically spend more time with PAs as health care providers, and PAs save as much as 20% of the total cost of medical care.



National Health Care Reform

EDUCATION

Physician assistants are educated in intensive medical programs accredited by the [Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant \(ARC-PA\)](#). The average PA program curriculum runs approximately 26 months. There are more than 140 accredited programs in the United States.

Because of the close working relationship PAs have with physicians, PAs are educated in a medical model designed to complement physician training. PA students are taught, as are medical students, to diagnose and treat medical problems.

The education consists of classroom and laboratory instruction in the basic medical and behavioral sciences (such as anatomy, pharmacology, pathophysiology, clinical medicine, and physical diagnosis), followed by clinical rotations in internal medicine, family medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, and geriatric medicine.



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