

Physician assistants (PAs) are healthcare professionals nationally certified to practice medicine as part of a team with physicians. PAs perform a comprehensive range of medical duties, from basic primary care to assisting in major surgery. They can prescribe medication in all states, the District of Columbia and most U.S. territories. A physician assistant's responsibilities depend on state laws, practice setting, their experience and the physician's scope of practice.



For more information about the
PA profession visit aapa.org

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Ask me what that means.

I'm state licensed and nationally certified
to practice medicine.

I'm part of a team dedicated to patient-centered care.

I have one of the best jobs in America!

Educated in the same medical model as physicians, PAs provide a broad range of services that are often the same as those you might receive from your doctor. You will find that PAs are patient-focused and willing to spend time with you during your visit.

Today, there are more than 90,000 certified PAs in the United States.

Q. What is a PA?

A. Physician assistants are licensed medical professionals who examine, test, treat, and prescribe medication for patients.

Like physicians, the exact duties of PAs depend on the type of medical setting in which they work, their level of experience, their specialty and state laws.

PAs can:

- Take patient medical histories
- Conduct physical exams
- Diagnose and treat illnesses
- Order and interpret tests
- Develop treatment plans
- Counsel on preventive healthcare
- Assist in surgery
- Write prescriptions

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands have laws or regulations for PA practice.

Q. Will my insurance cover an appointment with a PA?

A. Generally speaking, insurance companies will reimburse for a visit to a PA the same as a visit to a physician. Medical and surgical services delivered by PAs are covered by Medicare, Medicaid and nearly all private payers.

Q. Where do PAs work?

A. Like physicians, PAs provide care in all general practice settings as well as all specialty areas of medicine.

PAs treat patients in:

- Hospitals
- Physician offices
- Rural and urban community health centers
- Nursing homes
- Schools and university-based facilities
- Industrial settings
- Correctional institutions
- The uniformed services and other federal government agencies

Q. How are PAs educated?

A. PAs typically acquire extensive healthcare training and experience before they enter a 3-year intense graduate level program that requires the same prerequisite courses as medical schools.

First, PAs study the essential medical sciences such as microbiology, anatomy and physiology. The remainder of their training is spent doing clinical rotations in the fields of:

- Family medicine
- Internal medicine
- OB/GYN
- Pediatrics
- General surgery
- Orthopaedics
- Emergency medicine
- Psychiatry
- Geriatrics

Q. How are PAs authorized to practice medicine?

A. PAs must be licensed by their state to begin practicing medicine. All states, D.C. and all U.S. territories that license PAs require that they are certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) upon graduation from an accredited PA program. The NCCPA certification process requires graduation from an accredited PA program and successful completion of the national certifying examination.

In order to maintain certification, PAs must complete a recertification exam every six years (10 years beginning in 2014) as well as earn 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every two years. You will see PA-C, meaning “physician assistant certified,” in a PA’s credentials indicating current certification.

