

The Importance of PAs

PAs are vital to healthcare. The Affordable Care Act, which was enacted in 2010, recognized PAs for the first time as one of three primary care providers (PAs, Nurse Practitioners and Physicians). The law also empowered PAs to lead patient-centered medical teams. Team-based care is at the core of a PA's training. PAs can practice autonomously or in a collaborative relationship with other members of a patient's healthcare team. This combination is a major source of their strength.

PAs are experts in general medicine. They undergo rigorous medical training. PAs must take a test in general medicine in order to be licensed and certified. They must graduate from an accredited PA program and pass a certification exam. Like physicians and NPs, PAs must complete extensive continuing medical education throughout their careers.

PAs diagnose, treat and prescribe medicine. Thanks to an education modeled on the medical school curriculum, PAs learn to make life saving diagnostic and therapeutic decisions while working autonomously or in collaboration with other members of the healthcare team. PAs are certified as medical generalists with a foundation in primary care. Over the course of their careers, many PAs practice in two or three specialty areas, giving them deep experience and the flexibility to meet the changing needs of their patients, employers and communities.

PAs are trusted healthcare providers. Studies have shown that when PAs practice to the full extent of their abilities and training, hospital readmission rates and lengths of stay decrease and infection rates go down. A Harris Poll found extremely high satisfaction rates among Americans who interact with PAs. The survey found that 93 percent regard PAs as trusted healthcare providers, 92 percent said that having a PA makes it easier to get a medical appointment and 91 percent believe that PAs improve the quality of healthcare.

PAs are in heavy demand. Three quarters of PAs receive multiple job offers upon passing their initial licensing and certification exams. Studies show that the most financially successful hospitals maximize their use of PAs. The PA profession has been named by several top media outlets, including Forbes and USA Today, as the most promising job in America. The demand for PAs increased more than 300 percent from 2011 to 2014, according to the healthcare search firm Merritt Hawkins. As of January 2016, there were more than 108,000 certified PAs nationwide who interact patients upwards of 350 million times annually.