Physician Assistants in the US Health Workforce

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Over the past 50 years, the PA concept has been shown to be a remarkable workforce policy success:

- Prescribing in all states
- Reimbursement through all third-party payers
- High demand in the medical marketplace
- Utilization and new roles are expanding
- Clinical flexibility

Patients accept PAs; a poll showed that 66% of citizens recognize the PA role and one-third have been treated by a PA (AAPA, 2007)

The career is attractive with high levels of job satisfaction — mean salary is $102,000/year. High levels of job and career satisfaction among PAs.

One obvious factor: PAs complement physician practices and do not threaten physician roles or authority

The PA concept is spreading globally with programs now in Canada, England, Scotland, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Ghana, and the Netherlands

PAs have shown remarkable clinical mobility across medical specialties and settings

PA Population: 2012

(N = 77,859)

## Profile of PA - 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed PAs</td>
<td>~90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Care</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>42 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length in Practice (mean)</td>
<td>9 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length in Current Specialty (mean)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inpatient Hospital Unit</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Department</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital Based (includes OR, Outpatient, ED, and Inpatient)</td>
<td>47%</td>
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PAs
A physician assistant (PA) is nationally certified and state licensed to practice medicine as part of a physician-led team. PAs are educated at the graduate level and practice in nearly every medical specialty and setting.

Scope of Practice
• Obtain medical histories
• Conduct physical exams
• Diagnose and treat illnesses
• Order and interpret tests
• Counsel on preventive healthcare
• Assist in surgery
• Write prescriptions
• Make rounds in nursing homes and hospitals

* PAs’ responsibilities correspond to their supervising physicians’ practice.
PA Workforce is Youthful and Female

PA Supply by Age and Sex, 2013

Female

Male
Supply of PAs

- There are 182 accredited PA programs in the US with an additional 60 programs in the accreditation pipeline.
- The vast majority of total PA graduates (over 100,000) are in active clinical practice = 89,500.
- There are approximately 7000 annual PA graduates.
- Annual attrition is low = 2.9% annually (est).
Shortages projected for both primary care and subspecialists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary Care</th>
<th>Subspecialties</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>4,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>29,800</td>
<td>33,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>45,400</td>
<td>46,100</td>
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Hofer et al 2011; Hooker 2012; Lewin for AAMC, 2011; Huang & Finegold 2013
Primary Care in America:
Percentage of Providers Identified in Primary Care
Trends in Emergency Medicine

- The role of NP/PAs in emergency medicine is varied but spans the same degree of care as doctors
- Many PA/NPs staff “fast-track” (urgent care)
- In US EDs, there is one PA/NP for every five doctors
- ED: fast growth for PAs since 2000
- Team based care studies are needed to understand the dynamics and interaction of the players

*Hooker, Cipher 2008*
PAs on Inpatient Services

• Can provide the full range of clinical services required
• No decline in quality of care
• Enhance the educational experiences of residents
• Provide an element of continuity to inpatient services

US PA and NP Graduates Per Year (1992-2020)

Hooker et al 2013; 2011 PAEA & AACN data
The Effect of Health Reform

Demand:
• Enrollment of 30 million newly insured
• Aging population
• Sustainability of chronic diseases
• New technology (pharmacy, techniques, tools)
• Quality and cost-effectiveness imperatives
• Electronic health records
• Consolidation of small and medium size practices
• Hospitalization

Supply
• Physicians: 18,000 – 25,000 new graduates
• PAs: 7,000 new graduates annually
• Young profession (mean age = 42)
• Career span: 35 years
Going Forward

• PAs are a vital and flexible component of the US health care workforce
• The supply of PAs is expected to grow steadily over the next decade
• PAs are team-oriented, have training as medical generalists, and seek a practice stance closely aligned with physicians
References

- Hooker RS, Cawley JF, Leinweber W. Physician assistant career mobility and the potential for more primary care. *Health Affairs*. 2010; 29 (5); 880-886.