PA Career Flexibility: Factors Associated with Changing Specialties
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Background
- PAs, owing to their generalist medical education and certification, possess the flexibility to switch specialties throughout their careers.
- Prior literature suggests that approximately half exercise this option at some point in their career, and one-third do so within the first decade.
- More research is needed to understand the factors associated with PAs changing vs. remaining in the same specialty throughout their professional journey.

Method
- The study’s objective focused on the frequency of reported specialty changes by PAs and whether these changes were associated with various demographics and practice attributes.
- Data were derived from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).
- At the beginning of 2022, NCCPA augmented the PA Professional Profile by incorporating a question regarding the frequency of specialty changes throughout PA careers.
- At the end of 2023, this newly added question had a total of 121,947 responses (response rate of 81.3%).
- We conducted descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, and multivariate logistic regression in R version 4.2.3.

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Key Findings and Conclusion
- In multivariate logistic regression, the strongest association of switching was increasing years of certification. Compared to PAs certified for ten or fewer years, those certified for more than 31-40 years had 4.75 times higher odds of changing specialties.
- We found strong associations between switching specialties and the current specialties reported by PAs. Compared to primary care, practicing in internal medicine subspecialties was associated with a two-fold higher odds of switching.
- Other factors associated with switching specialties included having a secondary clinical position, a doctorate degree, serving in the armed forces, practicing in urgent care, and working in the federal government.
- Our research is consistent with prior studies demonstrating that over half of PAs have transitioned between at least two distinct disciplines throughout their careers.
- As PAs advance in their careers, the likelihood of specialty change increases.
- This study further substantiates the attributes of the PA profession, highlighting their adaptability and capacity for role mobility and career flexibility, characteristics unique among the healthcare profession.

References