

# **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 PAs' 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.

#### Email questions to Andrzej Kozikowski at andrzejk@nccpa.net



Overall, 53.4% of certified PAs had changed specialties at least once during their career; 22.8% changed once, 12.3% twice, 10.7% three times, 4.1% four times, 2.0% five times, and 1.6% six times or more.

#### Years Certified (p<0.001) Age (p<0.001)



When examining whether PAs have switched disciplines by years certified, we found a direct increasing trend (p<0.001). Specifically, 40.3% of PAs certified for up to 10 years have changed specialties. This proportion increased with years certified: 63.9% for 11-20 years, 69.5% for 21-30 years, 76.1% for 31-40 years, and 75.7% for those certified for more than 40 years. A similar trend was observed by age groups starting with 36.0% of PAs less than 35 years of age followed by 56.4% for 35-44 years, 65.2% for 45-54 years, 70.1% for 55-64 years and 70.3% for those age 65 or older.

### **Results**

#### **Personal and Professional Factors Associated with Changing Specialties** Certified 31-40 yrs vs. 10 or fewer (aOR 4.75; p<0.001) Certified 41+ yrs vs. 10 or fewer (aOR 4.61; p<0.001) Certified 21-30 yrs vs. 10 or fewer (aOR 3.44; p<0.001) Certified 11-20 yrs vs. 10 or fewer (aOR 2.65; p<0.001) Other vs. Primary Care (aOR 2.52; p<0.001) Internal medicine - subspecialties vs. Primary care (aOR 2.01; p<0.001) Critical care medicine vs. Primary care (aOR 1.92; p<0.001) Work in two+ clinical PA positions vs. One (aOR 1.90; p<0.001) Surgery - general vs. Primary care (aOR 1.81; p<0.001) Psychiatry vs. Primary care (aOR 1.75; p<0.001) Urgent care vs. Hospital (aOR 1.72; p<0.001) Independent contractor vs. Employee (aOR 1.54; p<0.001) Hospital medicine vs. Primary care (aOR 1.48; p<0.001) Dermatology vs. Primary care (aOR 1.36; p<0.001) Served in armed forces vs. Never served (aOR 1.32; p<0.001) Doctorate degree vs. Master's (aOR 1.30; p<0.001) Surgery - subspecialties vs. Primary care (aOR 1.23; p<0.001) Work in second non-clinical position vs. One clinical (aOR 1.22; p<0.001) Federal government vs. Hospital (aOR 1.21; p<0.001) Full or part owner vs. Employee (aOR 1.21; p<0.001) Speaks another language vs. English only (aOR 1.15; p<0.001) Other vs. Hospital (aOR 1.15; p<0.001) Emergency medicine vs. Primary care (aOR 1.11; p<0.001) Asian vs. White (aOR 0.94; p=0.023) Hispanic/Latino vs. Not (aOR 0.93; p=0.010) Provide care to underserved vs. Not (aOR 0.88; p<0.001) Midwest vs. South (aOR 0.88; p<0.001) Northeast vs. South (aOR 0.87; p<0.001) Other vs. Master's (aOR 0.83; p<0.001) Male vs. Female (aOR 0.74; p<0.001) 0.00 1.00 2.00 3.00 4.00 5.00

# **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 twofold 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

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