

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Nationally, only 0.2% ($n=227$) of Physician Assistants (PAs) practice in hospice and palliative medicine (HPM).¹ Despite a severe shortage of HPM clinicians expected in the coming years², there is little research on the role and interest of PA students in the subspecialty nor on the opportunity to actively recruit PA students to enter the HPM workforce.

PURPOSE

The study assessed the interest of current PA students in HPM and sought to identify ways to enhance student involvement in its main specialty organization, Physician Associates in Hospice and Palliative Medicine (PAHPM).

DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted using an online survey distributed through PAHPM via email and social media platforms focusing on current PA students interested in HPM. The questionnaire comprised eight closed-ended questions, including multiple-choice and select-all-that-apply items, and two open-ended questions to evaluate participants' attitudes towards PAHPM and the field of HPM. Data collection took place over one month (31 days), with measures taken to mitigate non-response bias through reminder emails to potential participants and the resharing of social media posts throughout the month.

RESULTS

Of the 33 respondents, 63.6% ($n=21$) were currently doing clinical rotations in PA school, while the rest were in their didactic year. Respondents were located throughout the United States, with main contingents from the Midwest (33.3%, $n=11$) and New England (21.2%, $n=7$).

The majority were interested in interacting with PAHPM through HPM education (63.6%, $n=21$), job opportunities (57.6%, $n=19$), and mentorship (51.1%, $n=17$). Students were also curious about clinical rotation sites (48.5%, $n=16$) and ways to get involved and advocate for the field (42.4%, $n=14$).

Eleven (33.3%) identified as members of PAHPM.

The main barrier to involvement in PAHPM was lack of knowledge about the organization (75.8%, $n=25$).

CONCLUSIONS

This study is the first known assessment of PA students' interest in HPM and provides insights into what these students seek from the main specialty organization for PAs in hospice and palliative medicine.

OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to identify PA students interested in hospice and palliative medicine and assess their awareness and involvement in the field.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

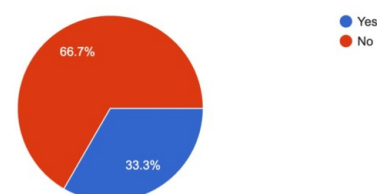
1. Identify the growing interest in hospice and palliative medicine among PA students.
2. Recognize the significance of enhancing organizational awareness as a means to support students and facilitate their future employment in the field of HPM.

METHODS

This study was a descriptive, cross-sectional investigation conducted through a survey. Google Forms was utilized to create and distribute the survey, enhancing accessibility and simplifying data collection. The target population consisted of current PA and pre-PA students with an interest in hospice and palliative medicine. To effectively reach this demographic, the survey was shared across PAHPM's Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Blue Sky accounts. The initial post was further disseminated by others, allowing the survey to extend its reach to potential participants beyond those following PAHPM accounts. Additionally, the survey was sent to the PAHPM email list. The questionnaire consisted of eight closed-ended questions, featuring both multiple-choice and select-all-that-apply formats, alongside two open-ended questions. These inquiries were designed to assess participants' attitudes and interests regarding PAHPM as well as the field of hospice and palliative medicine. Data collection lasted 31 days, with reminders sent through email and social media to minimize non-response bias.

FIGURE 1: PA Student Involvement in PAHPM

Are you a member of Physician Associates in Hospice & Palliative Medicine (PAHPM)?
33 responses



RESULTS

- 63.6% ($n=21$) of respondents were currently doing clinical rotations in PA school, the rest were in didactic year
- Main contingents were from the Midwest (33.3%, $n=11$) and New England (21.2%, $n=7$)
- Respondents were primarily seeking HPM education (63.6%, $n=21$), job opportunities (57.6%, $n=19$), and mentorship (51.1%, $n=17$)
- Students showed interest in clinical rotation sites (48.5%, $n=16$) and ways to get involved and advocate for the field (42.4%, $n=14$)
- Eleven (33.3%) respondents identified as members of PAHPM
- 72.7% ($n=24$) of respondents were unaware of the PAHPM student scholarship
 - Nine (27.3%) had heard of the scholarship
 - Two (6.1%) applied for the scholarship before.
- The main barrier to involvement in PAHPM was lack of knowledge about the organization (75.8%, $n=25$)

FIGURE 2: Respondent Priorities from PAHPM

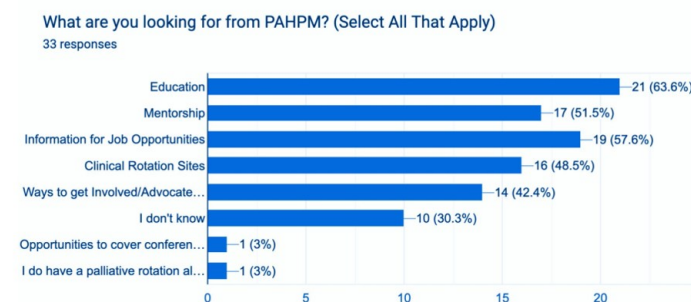
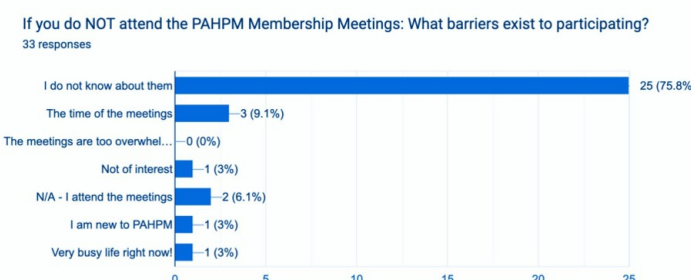


FIGURE 3: Barriers to PA Students to Connect with PAHPM



DISCUSSION

Specialty groups can offer students educational resources, networking opportunities, and exposure to the field. Our study found that many PA students are interested in the field of HPM and eager to get involved yet remain largely unaware of PAHPM and its efforts to support PAs and PA students. The primary limitations of this study include its small sample size, potential response bias, and limited generalizability due to reliance on a single organization for survey distribution. Further research is needed to explore practical approaches to address student needs and to draw more definitive conclusions with a larger sample size.

CONCLUSIONS

- This study is the first known assessment of PA students' interest in HPM.
- Students primarily seek education, job opportunities, and mentorship from the main specialty organization for PAs in hospice and palliative medicine.
- The main barrier to PA student involvement was a lack of knowledge of PAHPM.
- The best way to increase engagement from PA students interested in HPM is to better advertise and increase the visibility of PAHPM.

REFERENCES

1. NCCPA. 2023 statistical profile of board certified physician assistants annual report. *Statistical Profile of Board Certified Physician Assistants*. 2024. https://www.nccpa.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2023-Statistical-Profile-of-Board-Certified-PAs5_3_24.pdf.
2. Kamal AH, Bull JH, Swetz KM, Wolf SP, Shanafelt TD, Myers ER. Future of the palliative care workforce: preview to an impending crisis. *Am J Med*. 2017;130(2):113-114. doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2016.08.046