The PA profession, founded on the concept of collaborative practice, is a natural fit for today’s increasingly team-oriented care models. Across all medical and surgical specialties, PAs provide medical care, enhance care coordination, increase patient access, and contribute to improved quality. PAs are a cost-effective resource for meeting patients’ medical needs. A team approach supports efficient patient-centered healthcare.

All states, the District of Columbia, and all U.S. territories except Puerto Rico authorize PAs to practice medicine, including prescribing medications. PA scope of practice is determined by the PA’s education and experience, state law, facility policy and the needs of patients. PAs perform physical examinations, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret lab tests, perform procedures, assist in surgery and often serve as a patient’s principal healthcare provider. Numerous studies have found that PAs provide high-quality care.

**A HISTORY OF COLLABORATION**

Dating back to its start in the 1960s, the PA profession has always been based on a culture of teamwork. Since that time, PA scope of practice has grown significantly and the original one-PA-to-one-physician configuration has given way to a wide variety of collaborative arrangements. However, the commitment to team practice has not changed. Collaboration between physicians and PAs is especially effective because of their historical ties and similarities in their education and approach to patient care.

In many practices, PAs manage their own patients; in some cases, they are the only medical provider on site. Other practices use a model in which physicians and PAs together care for an increased number of patients. In that model, each provider manages some patients on their own, and they manage others together. This model reinforces continuity for patients when their usual provider is not available.

In surgical practices, PAs perform preoperative history and physical examinations, order and interpret tests, perform procedures, first assist in surgery and provide postoperative care. PAs and surgeons commonly trade off rounds and office visits. Studies show that efficient teams can see more patients and see them sooner, and experienced teams of surgeons and PAs develop efficiencies that can reduce operative and anesthesia times and patient length of stay in the hospital.

**PAs AND PHYSICIANS: CLINICAL COLLEAGUES**

The professional relationship between PAs and physicians is collaborative and collegial. The most successful clinical teams are those that utilize the skills and abilities of each team member most fully. Modernized practice laws allow healthcare teams to decide at the practice level how they will collaborate to best meet the needs of patients in their particular setting or specialty. A growing
number of states are repealing laws that contain outdated supervision requirements, such as requiring physicians to be on site for a set number of hours or within a specified proximity, instead allowing teams to determine how they will collaborate. In 2017, the PA profession adopted new policy on “Optimal Team Practice.” The policy calls for laws and regulations that

- Emphasize PA commitment to team practice;
- Authorize PAs to practice without an agreement with a specific physician—enabling practice-level decisions about collaboration;
- Create separate majority-PA boards to regulate PAs, or give that authority to boards that have as members both PAs and physicians who practice with PAs, and
- Authorize PAs to be directly reimbursed by all public and private insurers.

These changes benefit the healthcare system and healthcare teams and the patients they care for.

CONCLUSION

The PA profession is committed to preserving and enhancing team practice and believes that its hallmark flexibility is key to the ability of teams to adapt to the changing needs of practices and patients. During this time of innovation, with new healthcare models constantly being created and modified and patient expectations shifting, this flexibility is crucial.

To learn more about the PA profession and how PAs contribute to comprehensive patient-centered care, visit AAPA.org.

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