

PAs in the Emergency Medicine Workforce

Dawn Morton-Rias, Ed.D., PA-C, Kasey Puckett, MPH, Andrzej Kozlikowski, PhD, Colette Jeffery, MA, and Sheila Mauldin, MNM
National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants

Background

- With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to have a sufficient and capable Emergency Medicine (EM) workforce
- Providers practicing in EM are on the forefront of supplying early triage and management of COVID-19 patients and persist in holding an immense responsibility since the start of the pandemic
- However, more research is needed to better understand the demographic and practice characteristics of the PAs who practice in EM

Objective & Method

- A comprehensive, exploratory study was conducted to help quantify the contribution of PAs practicing in EM
- Data were derived from National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) PA Professional Profile Data is provided on the geographic distribution and growth of PAs practicing in EM from 2015 to 2020
- Key demographic and practice characteristics of PAs working in EM were compared to PAs practicing in all other specialties
- Analyses included descriptive statistics and bivariate chi-square tests for demographic and practice characteristic differences between PAs working in EM and all other specialties

Email questions to Kasey Puckett at kasey@nccpa.net

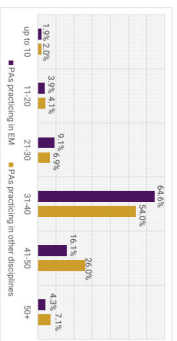
Demographic Characteristics of Certified PAs Practicing in EM

- There were 13,219 Certified PAs practicing in EM in the U.S. by end of 2020
- Compared to PAs practicing in all other disciplines, those practicing in EM were more likely to:
 - be in the 30-39 age group (42.9% vs. 39.8%; p<0.001)
 - be male (41.8% vs. 29.8%; p<0.001)
 - reside in the Northeast (25.5% vs. 24.8%; p=0.022)
- PAs practicing in EM self-identify as white (85.2%), Asian (5.5%), African American (3.5%), other (3.8%), and of multiple races (2.9%)
- 6.2% of PAs practicing in EM self-identify as Hispanic

Demographic characteristic of PAs practicing in EM vs. PAs practicing in all other disciplines	PAs practicing in EM	PAs practicing in all other disciplines	P-value
Age:			
Less than 30	11.9%	11.3%	
30-39	42.9%	39.8%	<0.001
40-49	14.1%	14.4%	
50-59	6.5%	8.6%	
60+	6.5%	8.6%	
Gender:			
Male	41.8%	29.8%	<0.001
Female	58.2%	70.2%	
Race:			
White	85.2%	85.1%	0.604
African American	3.5%	3.5%	
Hispanic	6.2%	3.8%	
Other	2.0%	2.9%	
Multiple Races	3.8%	3.7%	
Hispanic	91.8%	93.5%	0.222
Non-Hispanic Latino	6.2%	6.5%	
Hispanic	92.3%	92.4%	
Other	4.4%	4.4%	
Sexual Orientation:			
Same Gender	1.8%	1.9%	0.819
Opposite	1.5%	1.4%	
Prefer not to answer	31.8%	34.2%	
Age of first PAs working in EM	20.4%	24.8%	0.022
Worked	21.3%	21.3%	
Worked	20.3%	19.7%	

Findings

Number of Hours Worked Each Week



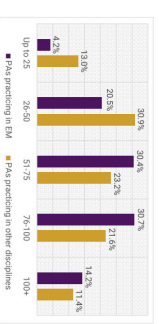
PAs practicing in EM were more likely to work 31-40 hours per week (64.6% compared to 54.0%; p<0.001 for PAs practicing in all other disciplines).

Retirement

PAs practicing in EM	PAs practicing in all other disciplines	P-value
Yes	4.7%	<0.001
No	95.3%	94.6%

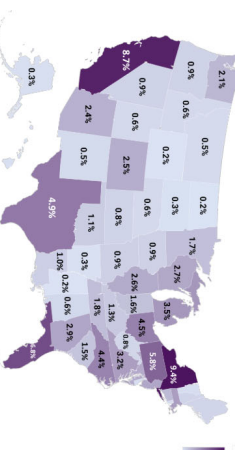
PAs practicing in EM were less likely to plan on retiring in the next 5 years (4.7% compared to 6.0%; p<0.001 for PAs practicing in all other specialties).

Number of Patients Seen Each Week



PAs practicing in EM were more likely to see 76-100 patients each week (30.7% compared to 21.6%; p<0.001 for PAs practicing in all other disciplines). PAs practicing in EM see a median number of 75 patients per week, while PAs practicing in all other disciplines see a median of 60 patients per week.

Geographic Distribution of Certified PAs Practicing in EM



The five states with the largest number of PAs practicing in EM are – NY (9.4%), CA (8.7%), FL (6.8%), PA (5.8%) and TX (4.9%). The five states with the largest number of PAs practicing in all other disciplines are – NY (8.6%), CA (7.4%), TX (7.1%), PA (6.9%), and FL (6.0%).

Services Provided in Principal Clinical Position for Most Patients

Service	PAs practicing in EM	PAs practicing in all other disciplines	P-value
Conduct physical examinations and obtain medical histories	97.1%	88.5%	
Obtain vital signs and manage acute illnesses	96.7%	79.9%	
Order perform and manage diagnostic studies	84.6%	79.2%	
Counsel and educate patients and families	82.5%	81.1%	
Manage chronic conditions	49.3%	40.2%	
Perform procedures	41.3%	52.7%	
Diagnose acute and chronic illnesses	38.5%	63.7%	
Provide preventive care, including screening and immunizations	20.7%	42.3%	

Use of Telemedicine

PAs practicing in EM	PAs practicing in all other disciplines	P-value
Yes	14.1%	<0.001
No	85.9%	78.4%

PAs practicing in EM were less likely to participate in telemedicine (14.1% compared to 21.6%; p<0.001 for PAs practicing in all other disciplines).

Results

- The absolute number of PAs practicing in EM has increased by 21.5% with 10,876 PAs in 2015 and 13,219 PAs in 2020
- PAs practicing in EM are more likely to work in two or more clinical positions compared to PAs practicing in all other specialties (22.3% vs. 10.2%; p<0.001, respectively)
- PAs practicing in EM worked a median number of 40 hours per week and saw a median of 75 patients per week
- Almost 97% of PAs practicing in EM diagnose, treat, and manage acute illnesses for most of their patients
- 98.8% of PAs practicing in EM indicated that they write prescriptions for patients with a median of 40 prescriptions provided per week
- PAs practicing in EM were less likely to be on call in their principal position than PAs practicing in all other disciplines (p<0.001)

Conclusions

- Understanding the composition and distribution of the PA workforce in EM is important as the rising demand for EM care grows
- This is particularly important during a health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to meet Americans' health care needs
- With less than 5 percent of PAs who practice in EM planning on retiring in the next 5 years, most will continue to be a critical part of the healthcare workforce

References

- National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, Inc. (2020, December). 2019 Annual Report of Certified Physician Assistants by Specialty. An Annual Report of the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. Retrieved from <https://www.nccpa.net/annual-report>