

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT / ASSOCIATE RETIREMENT INTENT: SEEKING THE EXIT RAMP

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Background

- Retirement patterns for American physician assistants/associates (PAs) are in flux as the first substantial cadre trained in the 1970s makes their retirement choices.
- Knowing the intentions to retire and the patterns of retirement can be useful to health system employers and workforce policymakers.
- As of 2020, there are approximately 149,000 Certified PAs (NCCPA 2021).
- Other research has estimated the annual attrition rate in the practicing PA population to be approximately 5% #

Background (continued)

- A 2011 survey PA retirement (N=625) found that the average age of retirement was 61 years ranging from 47 to 75.
- PA career duration was 29 years on average, and most were in primary care practices.
- Less than a fifth noted health reasons being a contributing factor for their retirement.
- Approximately 20% said that they had retired too early and would have preferred to postpone retirement

Physician Retirement Patterns

The average physician retirement age is typically older than the general population. Physician retirement often relates to job satisfaction - approximately 20% mentioned being burned out and frustrated with excessive paperwork and patient volume.

Key physician determinants for retirement include lifestyle preferences, finances, burnout levels, and dissatisfaction with how medicine is practiced today.

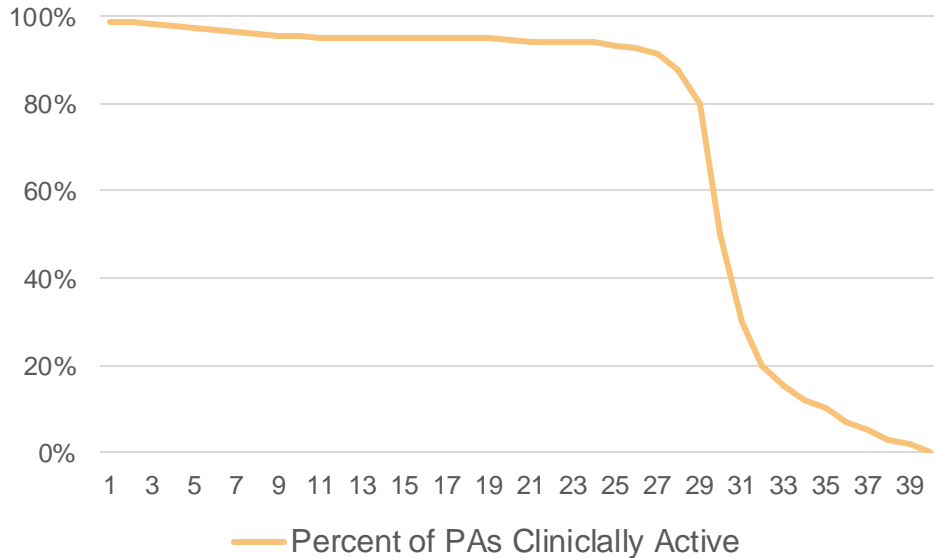
In the years preceding retirement,

almost 40% of physicians decreased their practice activity by 10% to 90%.

A systematic review based on 65 studies revealed that physicians retire between the ages of 60 and 69

Physician retirement is often a structured “phase out” of clinical practice, eg, a gradual cutback of time spent working

Estimated Percentage of PAs Clinically Active: 40 Years



- All (>99%) of graduates pass the PANCE with 5 years.
- The average age of graduates is 29 years.
- Three quarters (74%) of graduates are female.
- An estimated 50% of PAs will switch clinical roles within a career.

Research Question

What is the retirement pattern of American physician assistants/associates?

Methods

- National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) data
- Administrative and self-reported demographic and clinical practice characteristics of Certified PAs in the US
- The PA Professional Profile, online data gathering instrument – 86% participation
- The PA Professional Profile question added at the beginning of 2018 and used as the primary outcome variable in the study is: Do you plan to retire from the PA workforce in the next five years?

Variables

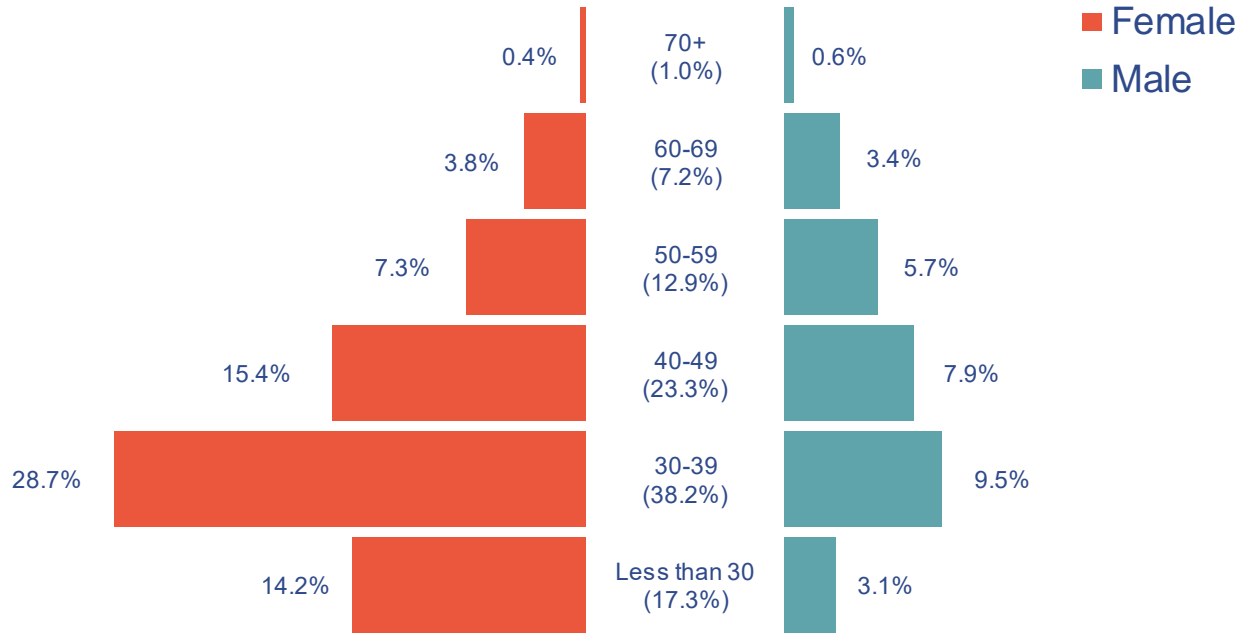
- Age
- Gender
- US region
- Years certified
- Specialty
- Practice setting

Statistics

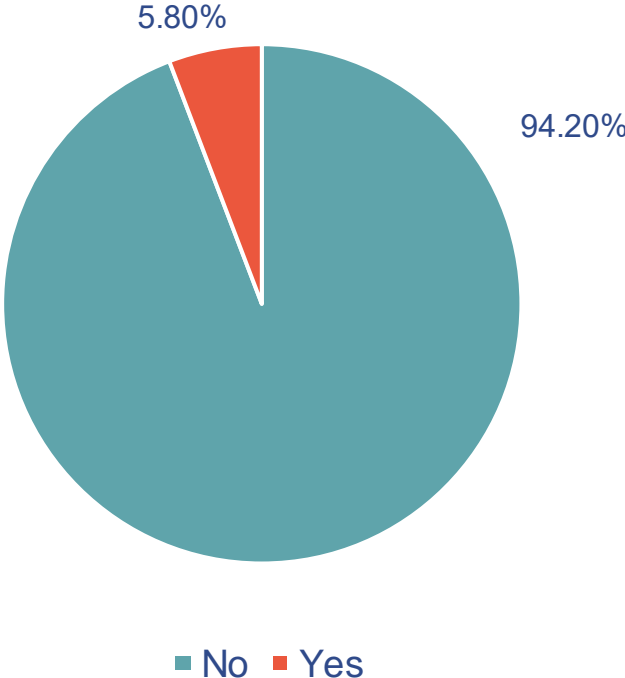
Descriptive statistics (counts and percentages) were calculated for all variables. Chi-square test or Fisher's Exact test, as appropriate, were conducted on all demographic and practice characteristics to examine if intentions to retire in the next five years were associated with a particular profile

A P value of 0.05 or less was considered statistically significant

Population Pyramid of US PAs 2020

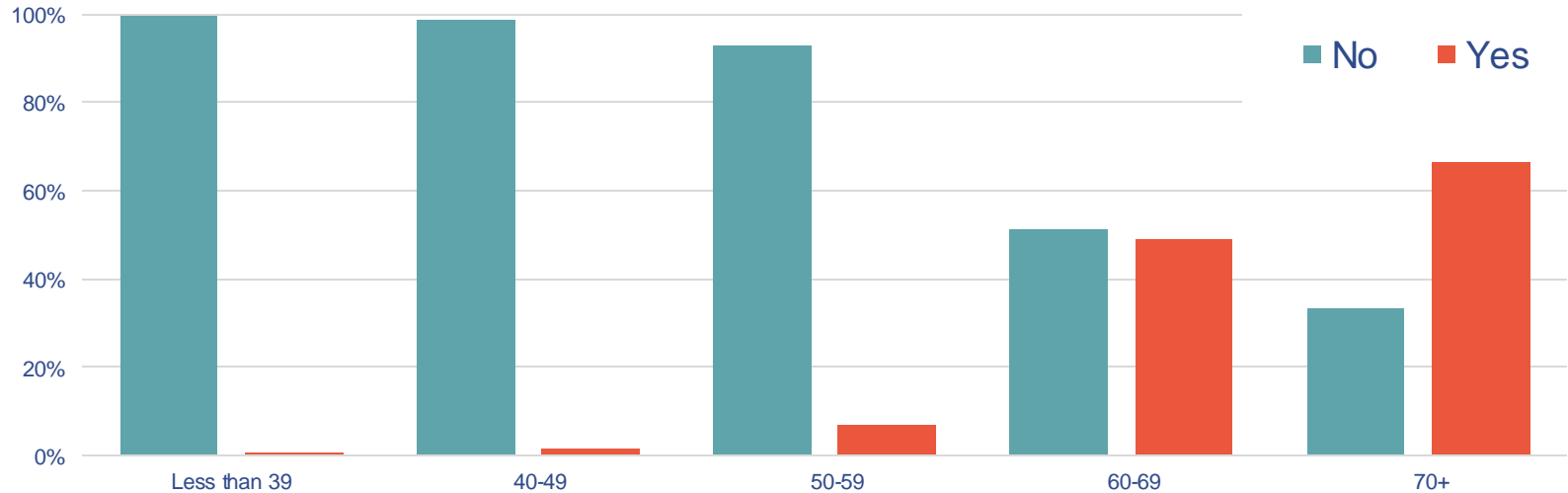


Plan to Retire from PA Workforce in the Next Five Years



Retire from PA Workforce by Demographic Characteristics

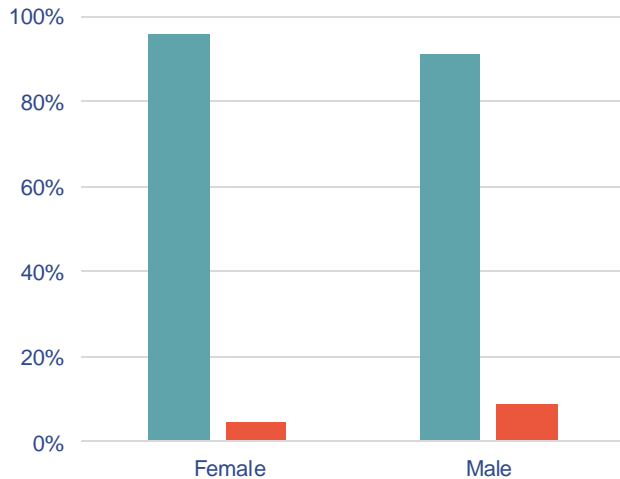
Age



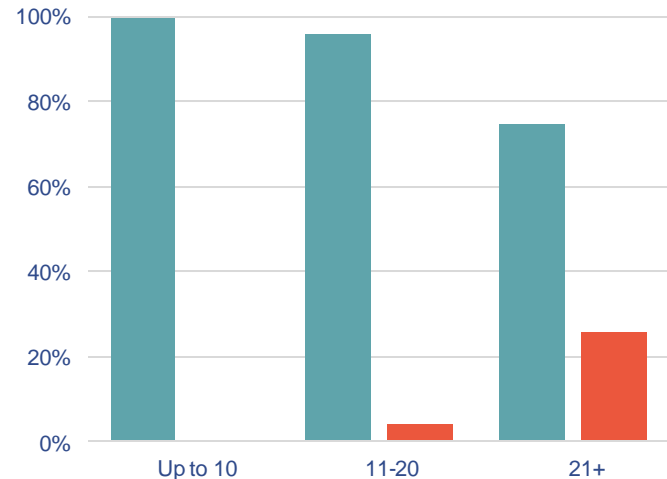
P-Value < 0.001

Retire from PA Workforce by Demographic Characteristics (continued)

Gender



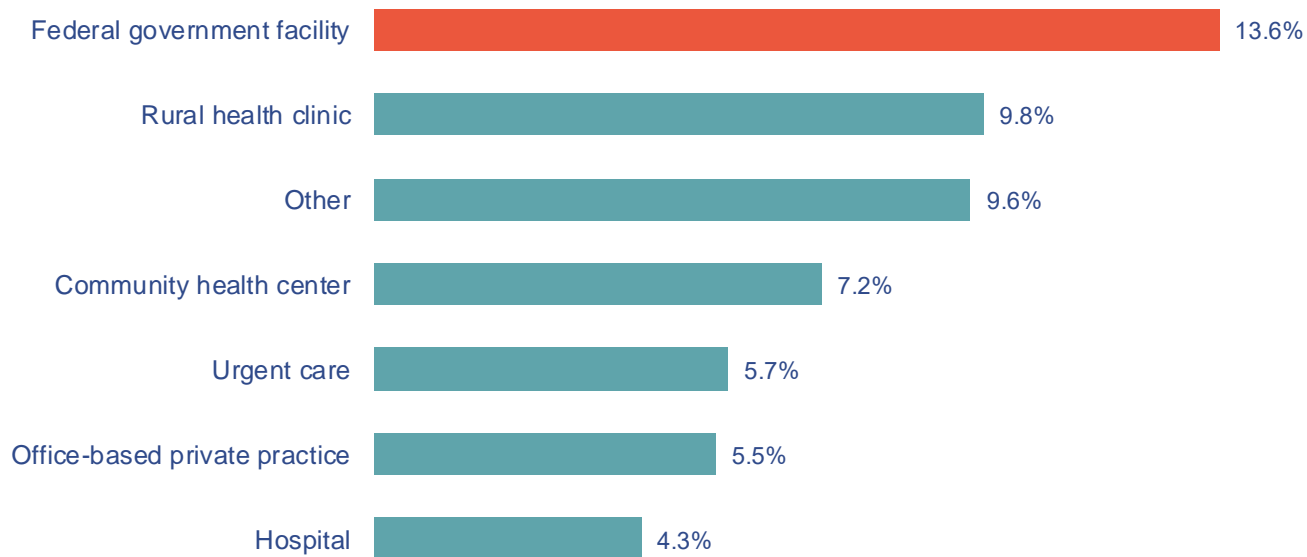
Years Certified



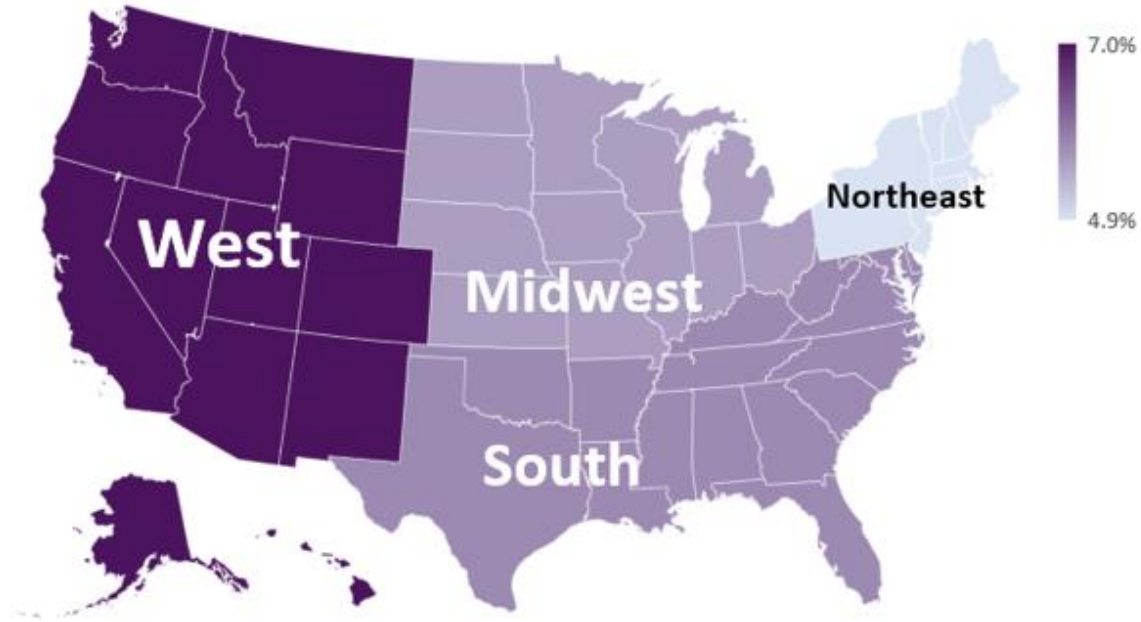
■ No ■ Yes

P-Value < 0.001

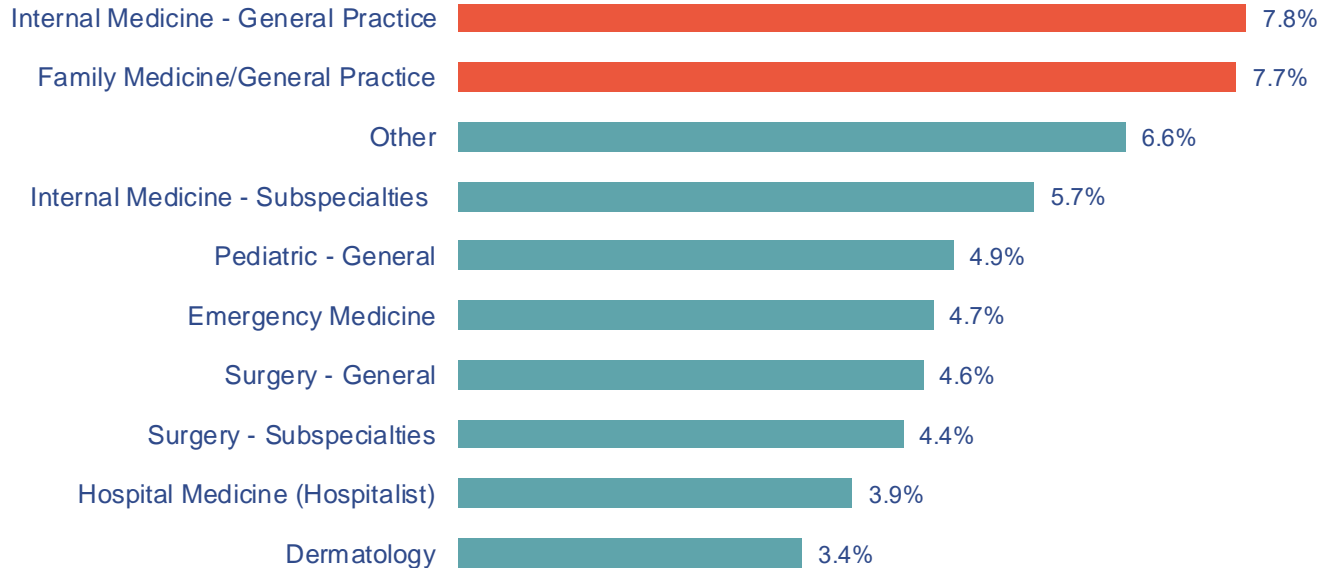
Practice Setting by Retirement



Intent to Retire by US Region



Intent to Retire by Specialty



Discussion

- We set out to describe newly emerging PA retirement patterns.
- The aim was to identify the demographics and job characteristics of American PAs intending to retire from clinical activity.
- PAs are retiring slightly older than those 10 years ago.
- Workforce implication: The profession is a young profession compared to medicine and APRNs, the mean of PAs is 42, whereas it is much older for physicians and advanced practice registered nurses

Why do some health professionals retire?

- A systematic review based on 65 studies revealed that physicians retire between the ages of 60 and 69; however, many delay due to financial obligations.
- NPs' intentions to retire study found that the majority (59%) of 60 years and older reported intending to retire in the next five years.
- Among PAs 60 and older, 51% indicated intended to retire in the next five years.

Conclusions

Intent to retire is a critical piece of labor information needed to understand the career path of the American PA.

The majority of PAs remain clinically active into their seventh decade.

At age 60, the predictive value of clinical departure increases.

Retirement predictors increase for:

- Males more than females
- Family medicine, general internal medicine, and internal medicine subspecialties

Sequel (further investigation)

- What are predictions for retention and retirement of PAs?
- Multivariate logistic regression
- What are patterns of PA retirement? Do PA patterns resemble physician patterns?

References

Combs, J., Hooker, R.S., Brunisholz, K. Physician Assistants and Their Intent to Retire. *AmJManaged Care* 2013;19:e262.e256.

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