

# Physician Assistant (PA) Education, Training, Collaboration, and Practice Act Legislation: Perspectives from the Practicing PA

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## Purpose

- Legislation is changing Physician Assistant practice in the United States with one of the proposed changes eliminating the legal requirement for a specific relationship between a PA and a physician to practice medicine.
- The purpose of this study is to examine the education, training, clinical experience, and collaborative practices from PAs with employment experience and to learn their perspectives on practice act legislation.

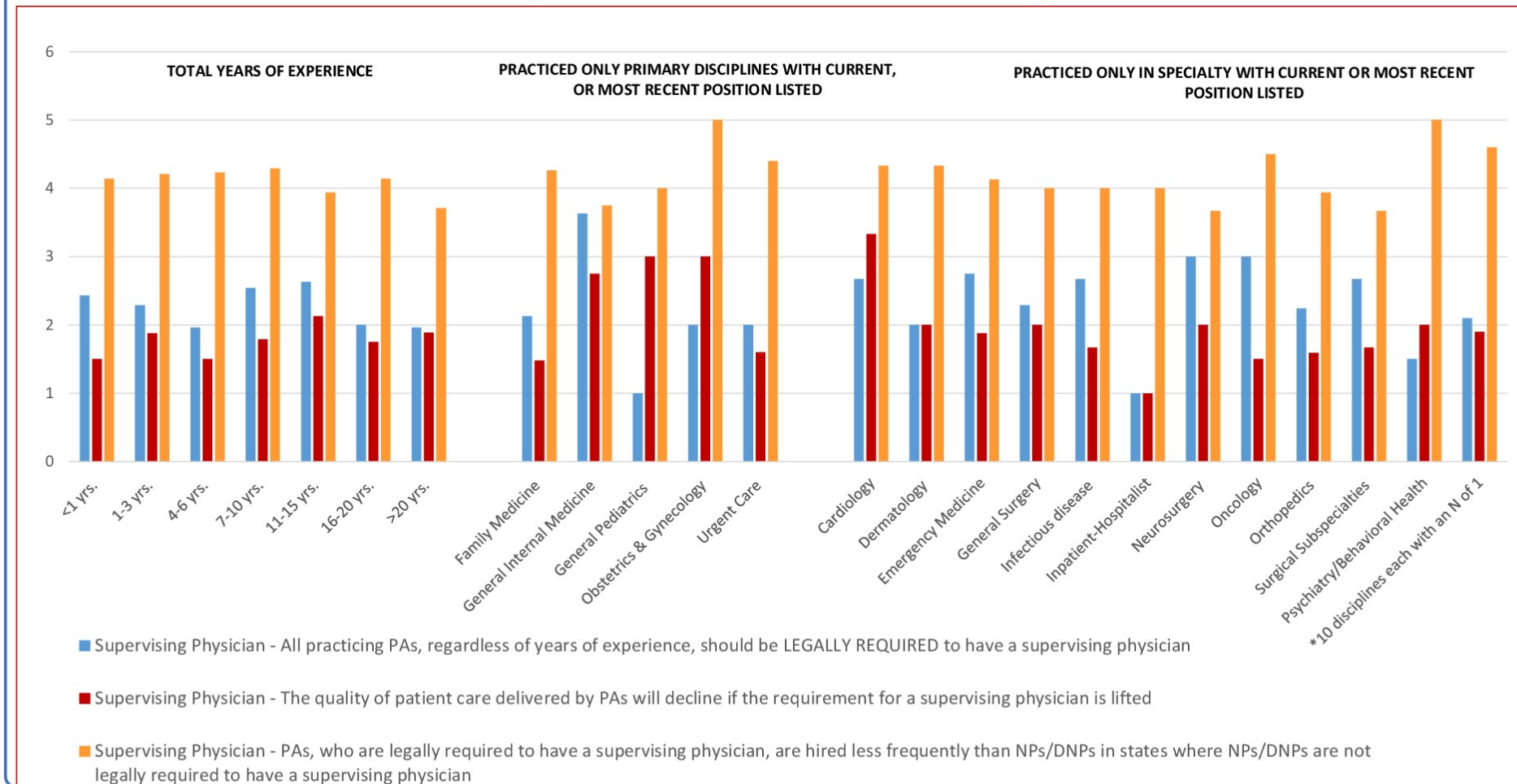
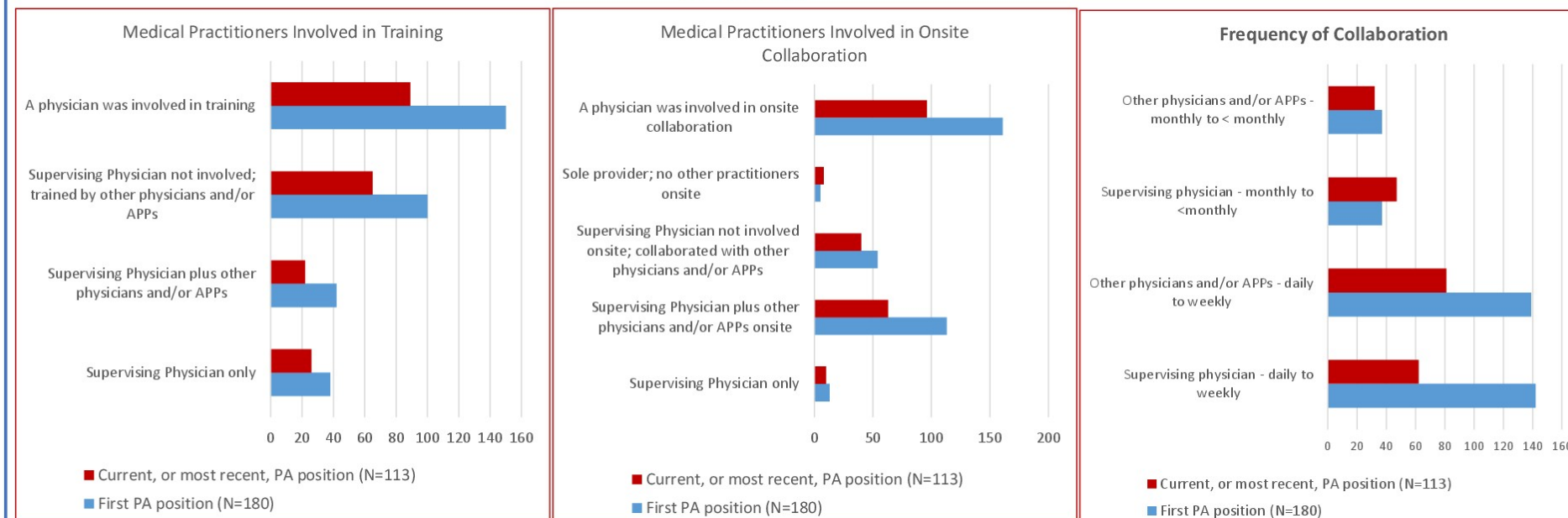
## Introduction

- Several states have passed legislation implementing Optimal Team Practice (OTP) into healthcare to remove the requirement for a specific relationship between a PA and a physician.
- OTP also removes the administrative constraints, authorizes direct payment to PAs, makes PAs legally responsible for patient care they provide, and potentially creates a separate majority-PA board to regulate PAs.<sup>1</sup>
- Regardless of such changes, OTP tenets are consistent with the commitment to team-based practice with PAs, physicians, and other healthcare providers working together to improve patient care.<sup>1</sup>
- With physician shortages nationwide, PAs are increasingly filling the role as primary care providers and clinical preceptors.<sup>2,4</sup>
- Physicians traditionally performed formal training of PA students, including precepting clinical clerkships; however, as the PA profession has grown it is common for students to be precepted by PAs and NPs.<sup>4</sup>
- As the PA profession continues to move toward adoption of OTP it is important to evaluate the practice experience of PAs and understand their perspectives on issues and changes in the profession.
  - How frequently PAs collaborate with their supervising physician
  - How autonomous PAs are in their practice
  - How years of experience and the medical disciplines practiced affects PAs' perspectives are questions this study addresses
  - Understanding the current practice landscape of PAs and their perspectives will assist in creation of policies that support all PAs

## Methods

- IRB approval was obtained through the University of South Dakota.
- This mixed method study includes quantitative and qualitative data, which were collected from a convenience sample of 180 (26%) PAs, most with past or current employment in South Dakota.
- Participants were asked to report demographics and various aspects of their training, experience, and collaborative practices.
- Respondents' perspectives of PA practice legislative topics were also gathered. Descriptives are reported where appropriate.
- Mean Likert scale responses were used to estimate participants' overall perspectives across three survey items related to PA practice legislation.

## Results



## Conclusions

- Most participants agree with lifting the requirement for physician supervision and further agree on a required minimum timeframe of full-time experience for new PAs and PAs new to a medical discipline.
- Although qualitative data revealed differing views on what might occur to the practice structure of PAs if physician supervision is removed, our findings suggest that team-based practice is the current structure.
- Employment training of PAs by multiple practitioners and ongoing, frequent collaboration between PAs and all medical practitioner types is occurring.
- Appropriate employment training and access to experienced medical practitioners for collaboration are important elements of the PA profession and PA practice.
- Ensuring preservation of these elements will provide vital support to PAs particularly if legislation includes eliminating the physician supervision requirement for PAs.
- Legislation to change PA Practice is likely to continue.
- Further research is warranted to determine the effects of PA Practice Act changes to employment training, collaborative practices, and hiring of PAs in states that have enacted such legislation

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