

Background

- PAs, owing to their generalist medical education and certification, possess the flexibility to switch specialties throughout their careers
- Prior literature suggests that approximately half exercise this option at some point in their career, and one-third do so within the first decade
- More research is needed to understand the factors associated with PAs changing vs. remaining in the same specialty throughout their professional journey

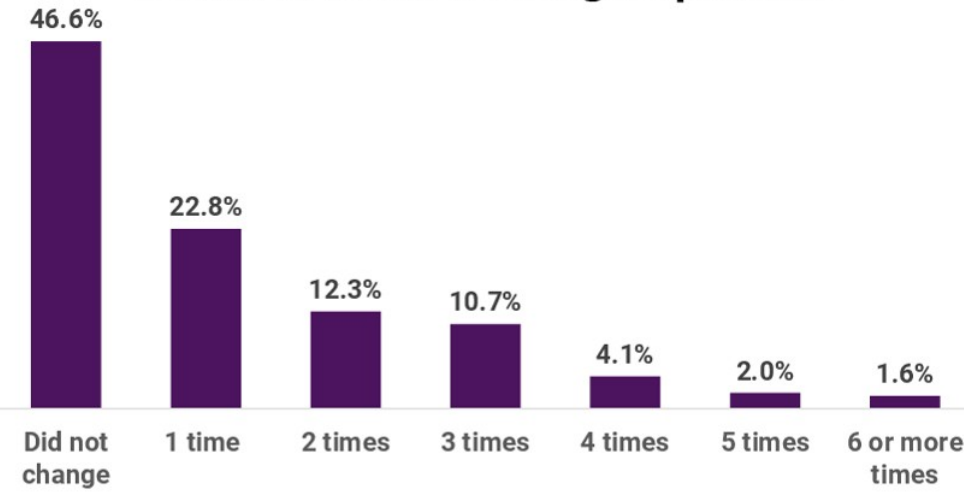
Method

- The study's objective focused on the frequency of reported specialty changes by PAs and whether these changes were associated with various demographics and practice attributes
- Data were derived from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA)
- At the beginning of 2022, NCCPA augmented the PA Professional Profile by incorporating a question regarding the frequency of specialty changes throughout PAs' careers
- At the end of 2023, this newly added question had a total of 121,947 responses (response rate of 81.3%)
- We conducted descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, and multivariate logistic regression in R version 4.2.3.

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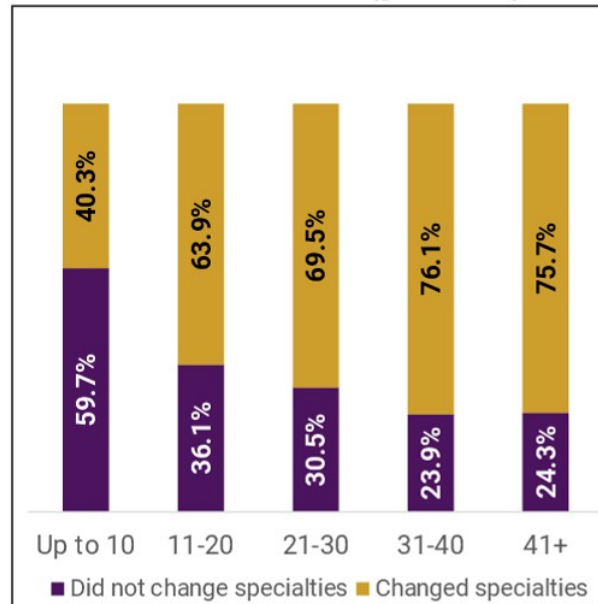
Results

Number of Times PAs Changed Specialties

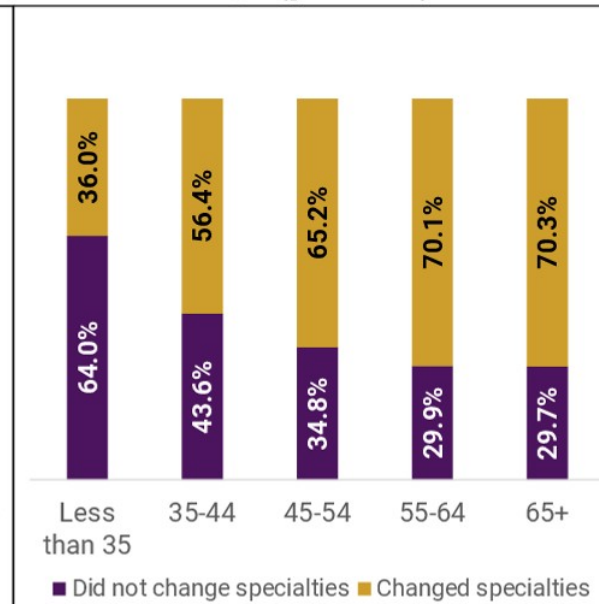


Overall, 53.4% of certified PAs had changed specialties at least once during their career; 22.8% changed once, 12.3% twice, 10.7% three times, 4.1% four times, 2.0% five times, and 1.6% six times or more.

Years Certified (p<0.001)

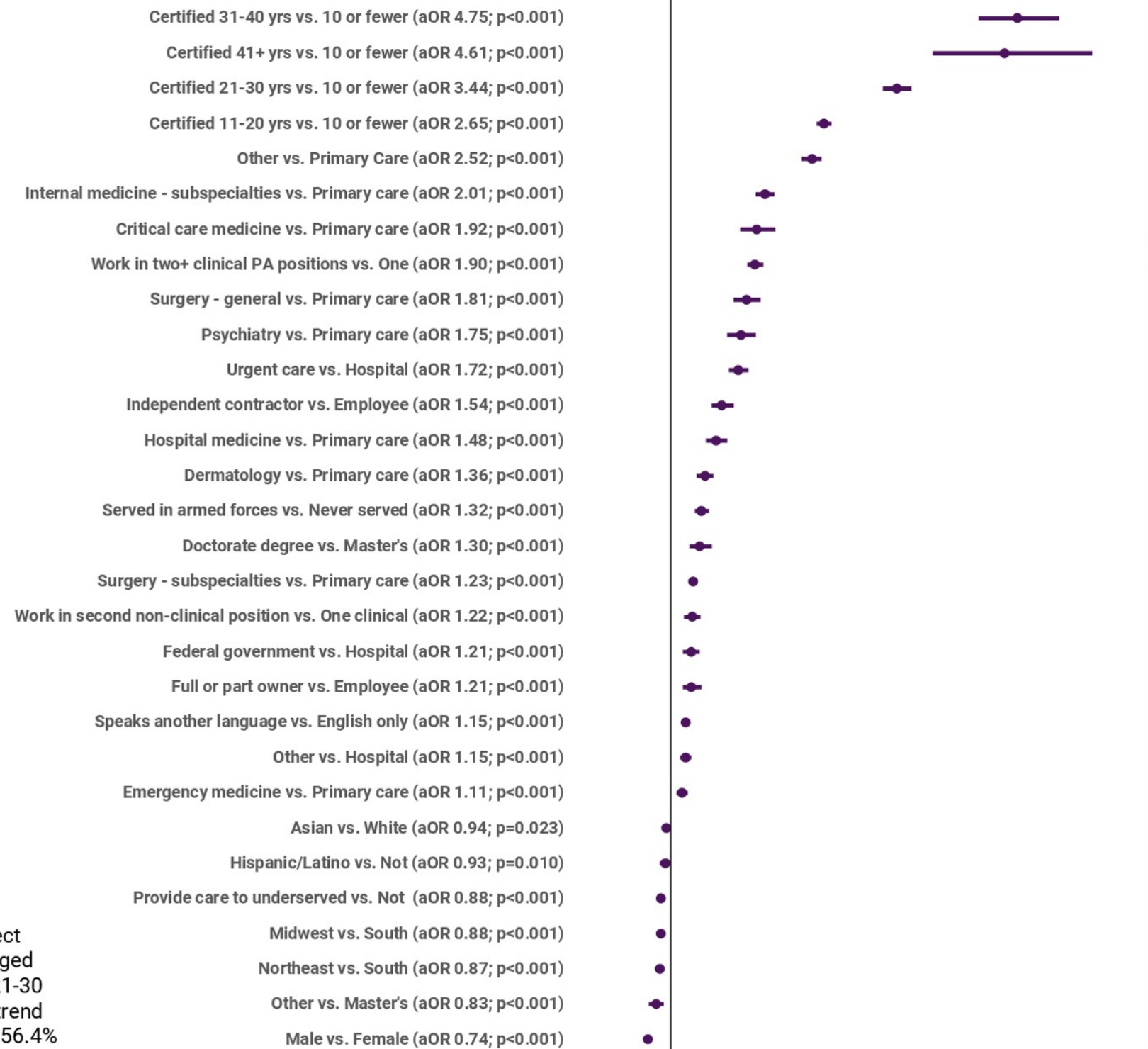


Age (p<0.001)



When examining whether PAs have switched disciplines by years certified, we found a direct increasing trend (p<0.001). Specifically, 40.3% of PAs certified for up to 10 years have changed specialties. This proportion increased with years certified: 63.9% for 11-20 years, 69.5% for 21-30 years, 76.1% for 31-40 years, and 75.7% for those certified for more than 40 years. A similar trend was observed by age groups starting with 36.0% of PAs less than 35 years of age followed by 56.4% for 35-44 years, 65.2% for 45-54 years, 70.1% for 55-64 years and 70.3% for those age 65 or older.

Personal and Professional Factors Associated with Changing Specialties



Key Findings and Conclusion

- In multivariate logistic regression, the strongest association of switching was increasing years of certification. Compared to PAs certified for ten or fewer years, those certified for more than 31-40 years had 4.75 times higher odds of changing specialties.
- We found strong associations between switching specialties and the current specialties reported by PAs. Compared to primary care, practicing in internal medicine subspecialties was associated with two-fold higher odds of switching
- Other factors associated with switching specialties included having a secondary clinical position, a doctorate degree, serving in the armed forces, practicing in urgent care, and working in the federal government
- Our research is consistent with prior studies demonstrating that over half of PAs have transitioned between at least two distinct disciplines throughout their careers
- As PAs advance in their careers, the likelihood of specialty change increases
- This study further substantiates the attributes of the PA profession, highlighting their adaptability and capacity for role mobility and career flexibility, characteristics unique among the healthcare profession

References

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