

# PA<sup>s</sup> PRACTICE MEDICINE

## WHAT IS A PA?

PA<sup>s</sup> are nationally certified and state licensed medical providers trained to diagnose and treat patients as well as prescribe medication. Thanks to an education modeled on the medical school curriculum, PA<sup>s</sup> learn to make life-saving diagnostic and therapeutic decisions while working autonomously or in collaboration with other members of the healthcare team.

PA<sup>s</sup> are certified as medical generalists with a foundation in primary care. Studies have shown that PA<sup>s</sup> help reduce hospital readmission rates, lengths of stay, and infection rates. Ninety-three percent of patients who recently interacted with a PA agreed that PA<sup>s</sup> are trusted healthcare providers.<sup>4</sup>

PA<sup>s</sup> practice in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, and the uniformed services. Today, there are more than 115,500 certified PA<sup>s</sup> in the United States.

PA<sup>s</sup> conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, write prescriptions, perform medical procedures, counsel patients on preventive healthcare, assist in surgery, and make rounds in nursing homes and hospitals, among many other medical services.

## WHERE DO PA<sup>s</sup> PRACTICE?

- Roughly one-fourth (24.6 percent) of PA<sup>s</sup> practice in primary care<sup>1</sup>, while other PA<sup>s</sup> practice in specialty medicine<sup>2</sup> or serve in leadership positions.
- Nearly half of PA<sup>s</sup> (45.3 percent) are employed by a physician office or clinic.<sup>1</sup>
- More than one-third (38.1 percent) practice in hospital settings (university or other). The remaining PA<sup>s</sup> work in a variety of settings, including community health centers, freestanding surgical facilities, nursing homes, school- or college-based facilities, workplace clinics, and correctional institutions.<sup>1</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest single employer of PA<sup>s</sup>.<sup>5</sup>

## HOW ARE PA<sup>s</sup> EDUCATED?

There are currently 225 accredited PA programs<sup>3</sup> and around 8,000 PA students taking the certifying exam each year<sup>6</sup>.

- PA<sup>s</sup> are often educated alongside physicians in medical schools, academic medical centers, and residencies. Because their education is modeled on the medical school curriculum, with a combination of classroom instruction and clinical rotations, PA<sup>s</sup> share diagnostic and therapeutic reasoning with physicians.
- After a year of classroom study, PA<sup>s</sup> complete an average of 1,700 hours of clinical rotations across all major medical specialties with an emphasis in family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, general surgery, emergency medicine, and psychiatry.

## TO BECOME A PA, STUDENTS MUST:

Attend and graduate from an accredited PA program ...

- The typical entering student has a bachelor's degree and approximately four years of healthcare experience.
- The average graduate program takes 27 continuous months (three academic years) to complete. Nearly all programs award master's degrees.

<sup>1</sup>2017 AAPA Salary Survey

<sup>2</sup>NCCPA 2016 Statistical Profile of Certified PA<sup>s</sup>

<sup>3</sup>ARC-PA

<sup>4</sup>Harris Poll conducted on behalf of AAPA

<sup>5</sup>Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association

<sup>6</sup>NCCPA PANCE Pass Rates

## TO PRACTICE AS A PA, PAs MUST:

- Graduate from an accredited program and pass the national PA certification exam administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).
- Obtain a state license.
- Complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years.
- Recertify every 10 years through an exam that evaluates generalist medical knowledge. PAs recertify as generalists, not specialists.

## WHY WERE PAs CREATED?

PAs have been practicing medicine for 50 years. The PA profession was created to address a physician shortage in the 1960s. The chair of the Department of Medicine at the Duke University Medical Center established a program in 1965 that educated military corpsmen to practice medicine. The first PAs graduated from Duke University in 1967.

## WHAT ABOUT REIMBURSEMENT FOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY PAs?

PAs offer great value to their employers by providing high-quality medical and surgical care to patients for which most public and private third-party payers reimburse.

## AND THE QUALITY OF PA CARE?

PAs are proven to create access, elevate health outcomes and increase patient satisfaction. Studies identify high-quality care with physician-PA teams and have shown that the quality of care provided by PAs is comparable to that of physicians, that PAs enhance care coordination, and that practices relying on PAs are more cost-effective than those without PAs.

## TOP SPECIALTIES<sup>2</sup>

|                                  |       |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Surgical Subspecialties          | 25.8% |
| Primary Care                     | 24.6% |
| Internal Medicine Subspecialties | 10.7% |
| Emergency Medicine               | 8.9%  |
| Pediatric Subspecialties         | 1.3%  |

## TOP STATES

The states with the greatest number of recently certified PAs include: New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, California and Florida.<sup>4</sup>

## VITAL STATISTICS

The profession is projected to grow 30% by 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.



50



states and the District of Columbia authorize PAs prescribing privileges.

262



The number of PA programs expected by 2019<sup>1</sup>

More than 115,500



certified PAs in the nation according to NCCPA.

\$102,000



was the median annual salary for a PA in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

The typical number of patients PAs see



15 per day & 63 per week<sup>2</sup>

The typical PA writes 50 prescriptions per week (numbers vary by setting and specialty)<sup>3\*</sup>



## PRIMARY EMPLOYER<sup>2</sup>



Outpatient (Solo or Group Practice) 44.9%



Hospital (University or Other) 32.3%



Government (Federal, State or Local) 3.7%



Federally Qualified Health Center 3.5%



<sup>1</sup>ARC-PA

<sup>2</sup>2017 AAPA Salary Survey

<sup>3</sup>2015 AAPA National Survey

<sup>4</sup>NCCPA 2015 Profile of Recently Certified PAs

\*This number reflects the median number of prescriptions written.