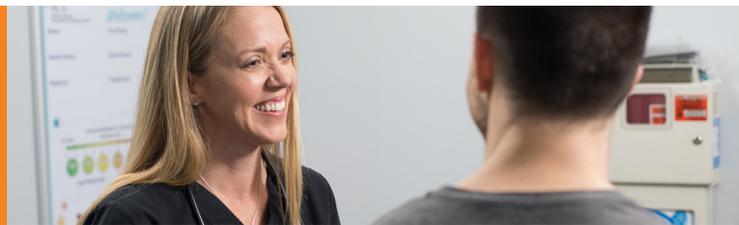# PAs & NPs:
Similarities & Differences

Both PAs and nurse practitioners (NPs) play an increasingly vital role as front-line healthcare providers. Although there are some significant differences in training and maintenance of certification requirements, the similarities between PAs and NPs far outweigh the differences. What is important for patients to know is that, regardless of whether they see a PA or an NP, they are being treated by a highly educated, well-trained healthcare provider who places the patient at the center of their care. The following highlights some of the key differences between PAs and NPs.

	PAs	NPs
What is a PA/NP?	PAs are medical professionals who diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medication, and often serve as a patient's principal healthcare provider. With thousands of hours of medical training, PAs are versatile and collaborative. PAs practice in every state and in every medical setting and specialty, improving healthcare access and quality.	NPs are nurse clinicians who blend clinical expertise in diagnosing and treating health conditions with an emphasis on disease prevention and health management.
How are PAs/NPs educated?	• Earn a master's degree and may obtain advanced degrees. • Curriculum is modeled on the medical school curriculum. • Students complete 2,000 hours of clinical rotations in family medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, and psychiatry. • Trained as medical generalists, which provides them diagnostic and treatment skills in all areas of medicine and for all patients, regardless of age or gender.	• Earn a master's degree; may obtain a doctor of nursing practice degree. • Trained in the advanced practice of nursing. • Students must complete 1,000 hours of supervised clinical practice. • Trained in a chosen health population focus area: Family, Adult/Gerontology, Neonatal, Pediatrics, Women's Health, or Psychiatric/Mental Health.
How are PAs/NPs regulated?	• Regulated by state medical boards or, in five states, by separate PA boards.	• Regulated by state nursing boards (in five states the medical board has some role in NP regulation).
How do PAs/NPs practice?	• The PA profession is pursuing Optimal Team Practice. OTP occurs when PAs, physicians, and other healthcare professionals work together to provide quality care without burdensome administrative constraints.	• NPs are pursuing full practice authority, which 22 states and the District of Columbia have already approved.
How do PAs maintain certification?	• 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every two years. • Recertify every 10 years through an exam that evaluates general medical knowledge. • PAs have one certifying body.	• 100 hours of continuing education (CE) and 1,000 clinical hours every five years. • No recertifying test required; may take an exam as an alternative to 1,000 hours of clinical practice every five years. • NPs have six certifying bodies from which to choose.

AAPA | aapa.org