



A Guide for Writing and Talking About PAs

Much has changed in medicine since the PA profession was established more than 50 years ago – including how PAs communicate the value they bring to healthcare. It’s not just the title that has evolved. Today’s PAs [“go beyond”](#) for their patients and their communities. Their individual stories are powerful tools to demonstrate PA value – to patients and to other stakeholders of a fragile healthcare system that is under tremendous stress.

This is a guide to communicating about the PA profession in a way that reflects modern PA practice and conveys PA commitment to team-based care. For more information or to seek additional guidance, please email communications@aapa.org.

PA Title Change

We have officially changed our professional title to physician associate in AAPA policy and changed the title of the organization to American Academy of Physician Associates. However, PAs should continue to use “physician assistant” or “PA” as their official legal title in a professional capacity, particularly in clinical settings and with patients, until the jurisdiction governing their licensure and practice has formally adopted the title of “physician associate.”

Implementing the new AAPA House of Delegates (HOD) policy is complex and challenging and may take several years to complete.

AAPA is using physician associate/physician assistant terminology throughout our assets and digital properties and on the website.

During this time of transition, the media is likely to use either physician associate or physician assistant – or both. AAPA is encouraging the media to use physician associates (or physician associates/physician assistants) when referring to the profession at large. However, AAPA advises PAs to identify themselves as a physician assistant or PA when speaking with the media to avoid being quoted as referring to yourself as a physician associate, which could potentially carry the same legal concerns as identifying yourself as a physician associate in a clinical setting.

The PA Abbreviation

When writing for external audiences, it is necessary to use the full title “physician associate/physician assistant” on first reference, followed by “PA” in parenthesis. Use “PA” in subsequent references. For example: I am a physician associate/physician assistant (PA). As a PA, I am committed to expanding patient access to care.

PA Definition

PAs are licensed clinicians who practice medicine in every specialty and setting. Trusted, rigorously educated and trained healthcare professionals, PAs are dedicated to expanding access to care and transforming health and wellness through patient-centered, team-based medical practice.

Established in 1967, the PA profession currently has approximately 159,000 practitioners in the U.S., engaging in more than 500 million patient interactions each year.

PAs in Team-Based Care

In today's healthcare delivery, PAs collaborate with physicians and other providers as part of a modern healthcare team committed to providing the best patient outcomes unique to a specific circumstance. It is common for a PA to serve as the lead on care coordination teams and see patients in all settings without a physician present. In fact, in many rural and underserved areas, a PA may be the only healthcare provider for hundreds of miles.

PAs are not "mid-level providers," "physician extenders," or "non-physician providers." The PA profession is a distinct healthcare profession whose value in delivering high-quality, team-based, patient-centered care has been demonstrated and documented.

PAs are not assistants to physicians. There is no possessive apostrophe in the title of the profession. The word "physician" in "physician associate" or "physician assistant" is not possessive or plural.

Grouping PAs with Other Providers

Grouping PAs with other providers should be avoided. In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of the terms "advanced practice provider" (APP) or "advanced practice clinician" (APC) by the media, hospitals, and healthcare organizations. These terms are imprecise and applied inconsistently. For example, one institution may refer to all providers with advanced degrees (APRNs, PAs, nutritionists, psychologists, etc.) as advanced practice providers or clinicians; another institution may intend to refer only to APRNs and PAs. Terms like APP dilute the distinct value of the PA profession and should be avoided.

If these terms cannot be avoided, indicate the provider groups that the terms represent in parenthesis after first use, for example: Green Hospital believes that advanced practice providers (PAs and APRNs) expand access to care and are critical to the delivery of healthcare in the community.

It is acceptable to use the terms APP and APC when referring to a specific title, department, or organization, for example: Director of Advanced Practice, Department of Advanced Practice Providers, Advanced Practice Provider Executives, etc.

The PA Honorific

To promote uniformity of address in clinical and other settings, use PA as the honorific before the person's name, for example: PA Pam Smith or PA Smith. Encourage the adoption of PA [surname] as the preferred form of address for PAs among staff and external audiences, unless a more suitable formal address is appropriate, such as military rank or academic role. For PAs who have a doctoral degree, using "Dr." before their name is appropriate in nonclinical settings.

Note that media outlets will usually not include the PA honorific before a name, in accordance with Associated Press Style.