

Adapted from ExploreHealthCareers.org

# Physician Assistant

## Overview

According to MONEY magazine, physician assistant is one of the Top 10 Best Jobs in America. Physician assistants (PAs) provide healthcare services under the supervision of physicians. They should not be confused with medical assistants, who perform routine clinical and clerical tasks.

PAs are formally trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive healthcare services, as delegated by a physician. Working as members of the healthcare team, they take medical histories, examine and treat patients, order and interpret laboratory tests and X-rays, make diagnoses, and prescribe medications. They also treat minor injuries by suturing, splinting, and casting. PAs record progress notes, instruct and counsel patients, and order or carry out therapy.

In 47 States and the District of Columbia, PAs may prescribe medications. They also may have managerial duties. Some order medical and laboratory supplies and equipment and may supervise technicians and assistants.

Physician assistants work under the supervision of a physician. However, PAs may be the principal care providers in rural or inner city clinics, where a physician is present for only 1 or 2 days each week. In such cases, the PA confers with the supervising physician and other medical professionals as needed or as required by law. PAs also may make house calls or go to hospitals and nursing homes to check on patients and report back to the physician.

## Working Conditions

Although PAs usually work in a comfortable, well-lighted environment, those in surgery often stand for long periods, and others do considerable walking. Schedules vary according to practice setting, and often depend on the hours of the supervising physician. The workweek of PAs in physicians' offices may include weekends, night hours, or early morning hospital rounds to visit patients. These workers also may be on call. PAs in clinics usually work a 40-hour week.

## Academic Requirements

All States require that new PAs complete an accredited, formal education program. As of July 2005, there were 137 accredited or provisionally accredited educational programs for physician assistants; more than 90 of these programs offered a master's degree. The rest offered either a bachelor's degree or an associate degree. Most PA graduates have at least a bachelor's degree.

The **Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants** makes it easy to apply to multiple schools using a single application.

## Professional Associations

- American Academy of Physician Assistants
- Physician Assistant Education Association

Source [www.paeonline.org](http://www.paeonline.org)

