

## Innovative Medical Careers: Physician Assistants

In the United States, a PA, or a Physician's Assistant, is a non-physician therapist, who is licensed to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician. In many cases, this supervision does not have to be direct and many Physician's Assistants practice in distant and remote locations like satellite clinics.

Physician Assistants prescribe medicine and treat patients and in some places in the United States, they are given a DEA number that gives them the power to prescribe specific controlled medicines, such as narcotics. In surgical procedures, Physician Assistants act as first assists during a surgery. They also offer medical services, which are compensated by a third party insurance company or by Medicare.

### How They Fare

In the year 2005, PA's held around 64,000 jobs. The number of jobs available is greater in proportion with the number of practicing Physician Assistants, since some PA's hold more than two jobs. For instance, many Physician Assistants work under a supervising physician and they also work in other clinics, hospitals or practice independently. According to the AAPA or the American Academy of Physician Assistants, in January 2006, there were almost 60,000 certified Physician Assistants practicing in clinics.

In 2005, over 50% of Physician Assistants were found to work in clinics and offices of physicians, either in osteopathic or allopathic practice. Almost 40% were hired by hospitals and the remaining few were engaged in nursing homes, prisons, The United States Department of Veterans Affairs, public health clinics, schools and home health care agencies. In addition, the AAPA states that almost 20% of all the Physician Assistants were found to provide health care to many rural communities.

### Accredited Programs

In 2006, almost 150 accredited Physician Assistants Programs exist. One governing body, the ARC-PA or the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, accredits all these programs. Most of these programs are Master's Degree programs, however, a few of them do provide undergraduate majors and graduate level training.

One governing body, the NCCPA or the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, grants the certification of a Physician Assistant.

### Other Innovative Medical Careers

Physician Assistants and the Nurse Practitioners provide similar services. The only dissimilarity would be that Nurse Practitioners are registered nurses and have to undergo extensive training, more than the PA's, and they have to obtain a Master's Degree in nursing. They are also known as APC's or Advanced Practice Clinicians or MLP's or Mid-Level Practitioners.

Medical Assistants perform routine clerical and clinical tasks at any physician's clinic. A Medical Assistant is a multifaceted healthcare practitioner, who is capable of performing a variety of laboratory and clinical procedures, along with certain administrative responsibilities. They are multi-skilled and versatile professionals. Their formal education takes place in community colleges, junior colleges, vocational or technical institutes or proprietary schools. The curriculum has to be accredited, if graduates plan on getting registered or certified. Accreditation requires that the school curriculum should offer classroom lectures and well equipped laboratories.

Today, many of the health care placements focus on healthcare services and almost 15% of all healthcare jobs available have increased. The factors that contribute towards the growth of jobs in this industry include the growing and aging population that demands additional medical services and of course the use of innovative medical technology for treatment and intensive diagnosis.

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### About the Author

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