



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

A brief educational and career guide prepared by:

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What is a Physician Assistant?

Physician Assistants are health professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. PAs work everywhere, from remote rural settings to major urban centers, in doctors' offices, hospitals, clinics, HMOs, the armed forces, and other federal government agencies. Some of the many functions performed by PAs include:

- Taking medical histories
- Performing physical exams
- Ordering laboratory tests
- Diagnosing illnesses
- Counseling patients
- Promoting "wellness"
- Assisting in surgery
- Prescribing and/or dispensing medication (in many states)

Most PAs work in primary care (family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and ob/gyn), but PAs can work in all specialties, including surgery, psychiatry, emergency medicine, and orthopedics.

How Do I Become a PA?

Graduation from an accredited PA program makes candidates eligible to take the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) certifying examination. All states except Mississippi have established licensure systems for PAs; almost all state licensure is contingent upon a passing score on the NCCPA exam. Those who pass the exam can use the title "Physician Assistant - Certified (PA-C)."

Programs

The typical PA program takes 2 years to complete. The first year is composed of classroom studies; during the second year, students perform clinical rotations. All PA programs award some sort of credential upon completion (a bachelor's, associate, or master's degree, or a certificate of completion). Since UNH students will be graduating from UNH with a bachelor's degree, they should consider master's degree programs or those certificate programs that require a BA or BS. The type of credential awarded to a graduate of a PA program does not directly affect the PA's employment opportunity or salary.

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Admissions Requirements

Admissions requirements vary widely from school to school, but generally master's degree and certificate-level PA programs expect a BA or BS with the following undergraduate curriculum:

- 1 year Anatomy and Physiology with lab (ANSC 511-512 or ZOOL 507-508)
- 1 year Biology with lab (BIOL 411-412)
- 1 year Chemistry with lab (CHEM 403-404)
- 1 year English
- 1 year Psychology/Sociology (PSYC 401 and SOC 500 are good choices)
- 1 or 2 semesters math (statistics and college level algebra)

In addition, many programs require one semester of organic chemistry, microbiology and biochemistry. An applicant's undergraduate major is not a factor in admission, so students may complete these prerequisites as major requirements, general education requirements, or as electives. Many PA programs expect applicants to have had significant hands-on health care experience. Expectations range from 500 to 2,000 hours of experience. The typical applicant already has a bachelor's degree and approximately 4 years of health care experience. Students should consult the Physician Assistants Education Association web site (www.paeaonline.org/) to research the specific requirements of the programs they are interested in.

Master's degree PA programs, as well as many certificate programs, require the GRE exam. The MCAT is not required. The central application service for the majority of PA programs is CASPA (www.caspaonline.org). Processing of applications usually begins in early May with deadlines between October and February.

Further Information

The most current information on PA programs is available from the Physician Assistants Education Association (PAEA), the unifying professional association for PAs. The web site includes a state by state listing of PA programs, degrees offered and contact information. Contact the PAEA at:

PAEA

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Sources: Most of the information in this brochure was taken from AAPA literature.