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# Physician Assistant



# What is a Physician Assistant?

A **physician assistant (PA)** is a nationally **certified and state-licensed medical professional**.

PAs practice medicine on healthcare teams with physicians and other providers. They practice and prescribe medication in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the majority of the U.S. territories and the uniformed services.

Inside PA Training

“All in all, I’ve had an amazing experience joining the field. I feel like I have found a professional home. I wanted work that makes a real difference in people’s lives. I wanted work that was challenging, but not tedious. I wanted to be compensated well for what I do, and I wanted a field that was broad enough that I would grow into it and not get bored. So far so good.”

[mypatraining.com/being-a-physician-assistant-part-i](http://mypatraining.com/being-a-physician-assistant-part-i)

# What can a PA Do?

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CAREERS: THE BASICS

Physician assistants work in collaboration with licensed physicians to provide medical care to patients. Duties include diagnosing and treating illnesses, performing physical examinations, assisting in surgeries, making rounds in hospitals, and performing assigned tasks during procedures. They may conduct physical exams, order different types of tests, develop treatment plans, write prescriptions, or monitor patients in medical facilities. Specific duties depend on the setting, state laws, and specialty area of individual PAs. This is a very patient-focused role and requires strong interpersonal skills.



## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CAREERS: IN-DEPTH

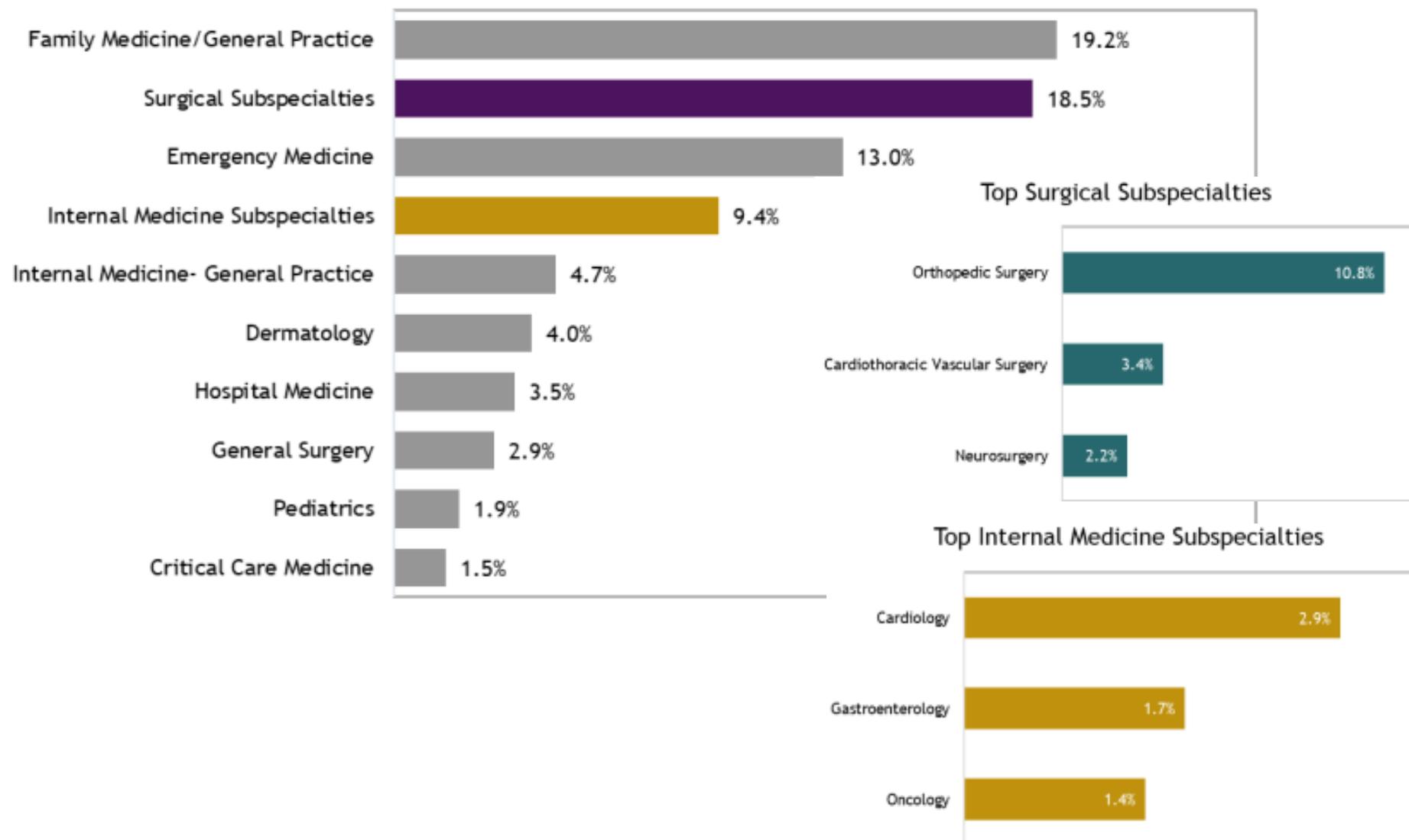
Physician assistant degree programs typically include 2,000 hours or more of clinical rotations, providing the PA with the applied experience needed to work in a variety of clinical and medical settings. A certified physician assistant is responsible for performing tasks and procedures under the supervision of a doctor or other medical professional. They may work in a specific field, such as family medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, or psychiatry.

Graduates of a PA program need to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) and obtain a state license before they can practice.

# PA vs NP vs MD

	Physician Assistant	Nurse Practitioner	Physician
Prerequisite Education	Bachelor's degree + clinical hours	Bachelor's in Nursing + clinical hours	Bachelor's degree
Learning Model	Medical – Physician	Medical – Nursing	Medical – Physician
Time in Classroom	1000 hours	500 hours	2 years
Time in Clinic	2000 hours	500-700 hours	2 years
Total Post High School Education	6-7 years	6-8 years	8 years
Residency	1-2 years (optional)	1-2 years (optional)	3-8 years (required)
Independent Practitioner	No	In 18 states	Yes
Perform Surgery	Assist	Assist	Yes
Conduct physicals, diagnose, treat, write prescriptions	Yes	Yes	Yes
US Base salary	\$104,860	\$110,930	\$208,000

# Top Ten PA Practice Areas



# Race and Ethnicity of Certified PAs

Race	Number	Percent
White	94,827	86.9%
Black/African American	3,951	3.6%
Asian	6,295	5.8%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	335	0.3%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	411	0.4%
Other	3,321	3.0%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>109,140</b>	<b>100%</b>

The chart above represents PAs who chose one race. 2,298 of respondents chose multiple races. 5,543 certified PAs who preferred not to answer the question.

Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a	2,726	2.4%
Puerto Rican	833	0.8%
Cuban	590	0.5%
Other Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish origin	2,929	2.6%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>7,078</b>	<b>6.3%</b>

The chart above represents certified PAs who reported one ethnicity. 299 respondents indicated two or more ethnicities. Of those who responded, 93.7% (104,550) indicated they were not Hispanic, Latino/a, or of Spanish origin. Respondents were able to select multiple ethnicities. 4,925 preferred not to answer the question.



The percentage of Hispanic PAs increased from 3.5% in 2000<sup>1</sup> to 6.3% in 2018, but has remained steady for the past six years.

# What are some skills necessary to become a PA?

## Clinical Competence

Be able to address the needs of patients in hospitals, emergency care facilities, and other medical setting and handle all types of patient needs and situations promptly and efficiently.

## Effective Communication Skills

Communicate directly with patients and colleagues in a variety of settings, often in high-stress conditions.

## Operational Management

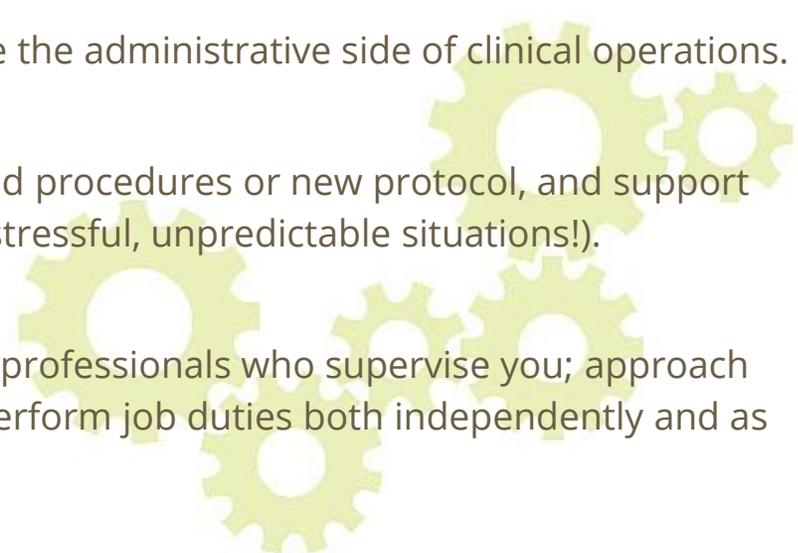
Take care of clerical tasks, oversee operations, and handle the administrative side of clinical operations.

## Adaptability and Flexibility

Handle emergency visits, assist physicians with unexpected procedures or new protocol, and support new patients during the intake process (often during stressful, unpredictable situations!).

## Service-Oriented

Provide excellent service, both to patients and to medical professionals who supervise you; approach days with a service-oriented mindset and be able to perform job duties both independently and as part of a team.



# Meet Dr. Eugene Stead



*A young Dr. Eugene Stead, 1908-2005  
Founder of the PA Program*

The PA profession was created to improve and expand healthcare. In the mid-1960s, physicians and educators recognized there was a shortage of primary care physicians. To remedy this, Dr. Eugene Stead of the Duke University Medical Center put together the first class of PAs in 1965. He selected Navy corpsmen who had received considerable medical training during their military service. Dr. Stead based the curriculum of the PA program on his knowledge of the fast-track training of doctors during World War II. The first PA class graduated from the Duke University PA program on Oct. 6, 1967.

The PA concept was lauded early on and gained acceptance and backing federally as early as the 1970s as a creative solution to physician shortages. The medical community helped support the profession and spurred setting accreditation standards, establishing a national certification and standardized examination, and developing continuing medical education requirements.

# I want to become a PA! Where do I start?

Look into PA programs you want to apply to as early as your first year in college. You'll typically need to complete at least two years of college coursework in basic and behavioral sciences before applying to a PA program, which is very similar to premedical studies.

The majority of PA programs have the following prerequisites:

- Chemistry
- Microbiology
- Physiology
- Biology
- Anatomy

Many PA programs also require prior healthcare experience with hands-on patient care.

You can get healthcare experience by being a (not an exhaustive list):

- Medical assistant
- Lab assistant/phlebotomist
- Emergency medical technician (EMT)
- Registered nurse
- Paramedic
- Emergency room technician
- Medic or medical corpsman
- Surgical tech
- Peace Corps volunteer
- Certified nursing assistant (CNA)

Most students have a bachelor's degree and about three years of healthcare experience before entering a program.

# PA Matriculant Numbers 16-17

From the Centralized Application Service for PA Programs (CASPA)

- 8,106 applicants out of 26,768 from 25 countries matriculated into a PA program
- Overall Matriculation: 31.7%
- Average Undergraduate GPAs: 3.56 Total, 3.51 Science
- Average GREs: 59.1% Verbal, 50.5% Quantitative, 58.1% Writing
- Gender: 73.6% Female, 26.4% Male
- Underrepresented Minorities: 11.4% URM, 88.6% Asian & Non-Hispanic White

[...details](#)

# Top PA Programs

*according to US News and World Report*

- Duke University (Durham, NC)
- University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA)
- Baylor College of Medicine (Houston, TX)
- University of Utah (Salt Lake City, UT)
- Emory University (Atlanta, GA)
- George Washington University (Washington, DC)
- University of Colorado (Aurora, CO)
- University of TX Southwestern Medical Center (Dallas, TX)
- Wake Forest University (Winston-Salem, NC)
- Drexel University (Philadelphia, PA)



# Sample Curriculum at Duke University

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug				
<b>Didactic Year</b>	Fall Term					Winter Break	Spring Term			Term Break	Summer Term						
	Anatomy						Fundamentals of Surgery										
	Patient Assessment & Counseling I						Patient Assessment & Counseling II				Patient Assessment & Counseling III						
	Basic Medical Science		Clinical Medicine I				Clinical Medicine II				Clinical Medicine III						
	Physiology		Diagnostic Methods I				Diagnostic Methods II				Diagnostic Methods III						
			Pharmacology I				Pharmacology II				Pharmacology III						
			Evidence-Based Practice I				Prevention & Population Health	Practice & the Health System									
<b>Clinical Year</b>	Emergency Medicine	Internal Medicine		Fall Break	Women's Health	Pediatrics	Winter Break	Primary Care		Behavioral Medicine	Evidence Based Practice II		Spring Break	General Surgery	Elective I	Elective II	Senior Seminar

- The first 12 months of the program are devoted to preclinical studies, and the last 12 months to clinical experiences in primary care and the medical and surgical specialties. All courses are required. Only full-time students are admitted.
- Students complete 10 rotations (eight required and two elective) and a senior seminar in year 2. Two rotations are required to take place in a medically underserved area.

# 5 Tips for Getting Into PA School



1. Prepare early: *find your program*, get clinical experience, keep up your GPA.
2. Get involved in extracurricular activities
3. Choose you undergrad classes wisely
4. Work in the summer: do research, take medical mission trips, be a medical or ER scribe
5. Find mentors

*...details*

# Additional Information and Resources

Physician Assistant Education Association: [paeaonline.org](http://paeaonline.org)

PA Focus: [pafocus.org/](http://pafocus.org/)

The Physician Assistant Life blog: [thepalife.com/](http://thepalife.com/)

American Academy of Physician Assistants: [AAPA.org](http://AAPA.org)

Overview of PA Career: [explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/19/Physician\\_Assistant](http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/19/Physician_Assistant)

Centralized Application Service for PAs (CASPA): [paeaonline.org/caspa/](http://paeaonline.org/caspa/)

PA Program Directory: [directory.paeaonline.org/](http://directory.paeaonline.org/)