

HISTORY OF THE PROFESSION

Definition of Profession

Physician Associates (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 practices. PAs diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medications, and often serve as a patient's principal healthcare provider. With thousands of hours of medical training, PAs are versatile and collaborative. PAs practice in every state and in every medical setting and specialty, improving healthcare access and quality. The scope of a PA's practice is determined by state law, the PA's education, experience, and the specialty and setting in which the PA practices.

Since the profession's inception, a series of changes in the types of degrees that PA programs confer have occurred. In the early days, PA programs awarded their graduates either a certificate or a baccalaureate degree. In 1973, the University of Colorado was the first PA school to grant a master's degree to its graduates. Since the new century, the number of PA programs offering master's degrees has increased, whereas those awarding certificates or baccalaureate degrees have declined. By the end of 2001, 54% of PA programs awarded master's degrees, and by 2010, 91% of them did, although this criterion did not become an accreditation standard until 2021. Leaders within the profession are now exploring the feasibility of making a doctoral degree the qualification for entry to practice. Meanwhile, during this evolutionary period, the Doctor of Medical Science (DMSc) has emerged as the PA-specific post-professional doctoral program available to master's level graduates of any ARC-PA-accredited PA program. These programs provide additional skills and competencies relevant to professional PA practice, enhancing training for leadership, research, and education roles. Most DMSc programs are entirely online and asynchronous, although some require a residency component. Additionally, most programs cover evidence-based medicine, scholarship, and leadership.

(adapted from AAPA: <https://www.aapa.org/what-is-a-pa/>)

History of Profession

In the mid-1960s, physicians and educators recognized a shortage of primary-care physicians. Eugene A. Stead Jr., MD, of the Duke University Medical Center put together the first class of physician assistants in 1965 to answer this need. He selected Navy corpsmen who had received considerable medical training during their military service to be the inaugural PA students. Stead mirrored the curriculum of the PA program on 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 as a creative solution to physician shortages and gained acceptance and federal backing as early as the 1970s. The medical community supported the new profession and spurred setting accreditation standards, establishing a national certification with a standardized examination, and developing continuing medical education requirements. Today, PAs are one of the fastest-growing occupations on the front lines of healthcare. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the profession will increase 31 percent from 2020 to 2030, significantly faster than the average for all occupations. The demand for PAs is so high that a 2022 report found that three quarters of PAs receive multiple job offers upon graduation. By the end of 2024,

there were over 189,000 board-certified physician associates (PAs) in the United States. Among them, 9% reported holding full-time faculty positions, 26.7% worked in medical administration, while another 22.4% were involved at least part time in administration, health assessments, quality improvement/control, medical research, or IT/medical informatics. However, fewer than 2.7% of PAs are trained at the doctoral level for these roles.

There is a growing demand among PAs for doctoral training. From 2020 to 2023, the proportion of PAs planning to pursue a degree related to the PA profession increased by 46%, with those interested in an advanced degree rising by 141%. This need is strong for doctoral trained PA educators. As a result, the number of Doctor of Medical Science programs has doubled between 2022 and 2024.

(<http://www.pahx.org/>)