

Pursuing a Career as a Physician Assistant/Associate (PA)

Profession Overview

Physician Assistant/Associate, also known as PAs, practice medicine under the direction and supervision of physicians. Through state-by-state legislative and regulatory changes, PAs are transitioning from “Assistant” to “Associate” to better reflect PAs' independent diagnostic, treatment, and prescribing roles. Typical Duties:

- ▶ Review patients' medical histories
- ▶ Conduct physical exams to check patients' health
- ▶ Order and interpret diagnostic tests, such as blood tests
- ▶ Make preliminary diagnoses concerning a patient's injury or illness
- ▶ Provide treatment, such as setting broken bones and giving immunizations
- ▶ Counsel patients and their families
- ▶ Prescribe medicine

PAs work in all areas of medicine, including primary care and family medicine, emergency medicine, and psychiatry. PAs' work largely depends on their specialty and what their supervising physician needs them to do. The typical employers of PAs are offices of physicians, hospitals, and outpatient care centers. PAs often spend much of their day on their feet, making rounds and evaluating patients. In hospitals, PAs may work nights, weekends, or holidays. They may also be on call, meaning that they must be ready to respond to a work request with little notice. Check out more information about this career [on the Explore Health Careers webpage](#).

Education Programs

PA programs usually take 2-3 years of full-time study. Most accredited programs offer a Master's degree in Physician Assistant Studies, include classroom instruction and around 2,000 hours of clinical rotations. All states require PAs to be licensed, which means candidates must pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). Accreditation and PANCE pass rates are important considerations for you when selecting programs. You should also consider factors such as: finances, in-state versus out-of-state, program length, mission and more. [View a list of accredited PA programs](#) for accreditation status and also utilize the Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) [program directory](#) for additional program specific details.

Admission Requirements: Knowledge and Strategies

Application requirements and deadlines vary widely by PA program. First visit CASPA and each program website directly to identify the requirements for programs that interest you. Work with your faculty advisor and/or a member

of [Kenyon's Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#) to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's individual website for specific requirements. Common course requirements include: Human anatomy and physiology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, general biology, genetics, microbiology, statistics, and general psychology. Some programs will require additional courses like medical terminology, college algebra/higher mathematics and abnormal or lifespan psychology. Individual schools determine how many prerequisites must be completed prior to applying. Many will allow 1-2 uncompleted classes at the time of application. PA prerequisites vary widely: planning for specific programs is key! Communicating directly with PA programs of interest about what courses they will accept to complete their requirements is encouraged.

Most PA schools require a minimum number of direct patient care hours, ranging from 40-4,000 documented hours. Gaining these experiences will mean exploring opportunities and tracking hours in an organized manner. What qualifies as direct patient care may also vary from school to school (example: some PA programs accept shadowing hours for this requirement, others do not). Common options for obtaining such hours include: Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Medical Assistant, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) and Phlebotomist. It is extremely common for students to obtain the majority of these hours post-graduation, in the form of a full-time direct patient care job.

Standardized Test

Depending on your programs of interest, you will be preparing and taking either the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) or PA-CAT. Learn more about the GRE on [ETS's website](#). A new test has been piloted by select PA programs, called the [Physician Assistant College Admission Test \(PA-CAT\)](#). Check your programs of interest to see if any are moving to using the PA-CAT in place of the GRE. Currently, very few programs require the PA-CAT.

General Advising Information

- When you submit an application, remember you will do so through a centralized application site: [Central Application Service for Physician Assistants \(CASPA\)](#). CASPA typically opens in late April of each year.
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and professionals. Such connections can open opportunities and letters of recommendation will be required to apply. Typically, three letters of recommendation are necessary. Ideally, at least one should be from a science professor and one from a Physician Assistant. CASPA allows a maximum of five letter writers to be requested within the portal.
- Plan financially: there is a cost associated with standardized tests and applying to schools. Costs of attending individual programs also vary widely. Find out more about paying for PA school [on the PAEA website](#).

Want more information?

Make an appointment with Sara Stasko in the CDO via [Handshake](#) or email stasko1@kenyon.edu. Connect with a faculty advisor on the [Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#).