

## ABSTRACT

Many nations throughout the world are exploring or re-exploring the physician assistant (PA) concept as a way to quickly and efficiently train and employ highly autonomous and flexible health workers to address their nations' health care needs. The Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), along with the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), is actively sharing information about the PA profession with other countries. Several countries are utilizing US-trained PAs in pilot programs and/or have currently established or will begin a PA program within the next year. In addition, many PA programs have affiliation agreements with institutions outside of the United States to host PA students for clinical rotations. In the United States, the PA model has proven to be a cost-effective way to train quality primary care providers, and there has been a high degree of acceptance of the PA role by patients and other health care providers. PA education is efficient and flexible and the PA model can be easily adapted to the specific health needs of other nations.

# The Global Development of Physician Assistants

**Physician Assistant Education Association International Affairs Committee (PAEA):** David Fahringer, PA-C; Rachel Ditoro, MSPAS, PA-C; Nadia Miniclier, MS, PA-C; Donald Allison, MPAS, PA-C; Justine Strand, DrPH, PA-C; Kirsten Thomsen, PA; Vickie Lisowski; Lynn Heitzman, PAEA Staff

## INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE PA PROFESSION

- Initiated in response to a health workforce need
- PA programs in England, Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia
- Expansion of PA student placements at international sites

Physician Assistant Education Association International Affairs Committee

## INTERNATIONAL SURVEY 2008 PA PROGRAM STUDENT PLACEMENT SITES

Survey Response Rate: 75% (107 of 142 programs)  
Programs with Active Rotations: 44%  
Programs with Inactive Rotations: 40%

Central/North/South America	Africa	Asia/Indian
Belize = 13	Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana = 1	Cambodia = 1
Bolivia = 3	Tanzania = 2	China = 5
Costa Rica = 4	Ethiopia, Zambia = 3	India = 14
Ecuador = 7	Togo, Uganda, Unspecified = 3	Philippines = 2
El Salvador, Panama, Cuba, Chile, Brazil = 1	Mali, Madagascar, Rwanda, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan = 1	Thailand = 2
Guatemala = 14		Nepal = 2
Honduras = 5		Pakistan = 1
Mexico = 12		Sri Lanka = 2
Nicaragua = 8	South Africa = 8	
Peru = 6	Algeria = 1	
Canada = 3	Kenya = 4	
Eastern & Western Europe/Northern Asia	Australia/South Pacific	Caribbean
Germany = 3	Australia = 3	Dominican Republic = 3
Italy, Sweden = 1	Papua New Guinea = 1	Haiti = 5
United Kingdom = 8		Jamaica = 3
Ireland = 2	Samoa = 1	Puerto Rico = 1
Ukraine, Romania, Moldova = 1	Guam = 2	

\*Unspecified = 3

## STEPS NEEDED TO CREATE A NEW HEALTH PROFESSION

- Determine the type of health professional needed to provide care for the underserved communities
- Identify key individuals from the medical community, government, ministry of health, and others interested in the development of a new health professional
- Review health professional training programs from other countries, such as the PA model, to determine applicability

## SUMMARY

- Physician assistant model is proven to be a cost-effective way to train a quality primary care provider.
- Physician assistant education is efficient, flexible, and competency-based in primary care.
- There is a high degree of acceptance of the physician assistant role by patients and other health care providers.
- Internationally, the model can be easily adapted to the specific health needs of many nations.

## WHAT IS A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT?

In the United States, physician assistants are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision and educated in the medical model. Their training is designed to complement physician training.

Within the physician-PA relationship, PAs exercise autonomy in medical decision making and provide a broad range of diagnostic and therapeutic services, including physical exams, diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering and interpreting tests, counseling on preventive health care, assisting in surgery, and writing prescriptions. Physician assistants are also involved in education, research, and administrative services.

Graduation from a PA program accredited by the ARC-PA and passage of the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination, administered by NCCPA, are required for state licensure.

The PA profession is one of the 10 fastest growing occupations in the United States. There are more than 68,100 practicing PAs.

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION FACTS – 2008

Almost 80,000 people eligible to practice as PAs  
Accredited PA Educational Programs – 142

- Three quarters confer a master's degree
- Average length of a PA program is 27 months
- Competency-based primary care curriculum

Students enrolled in PA programs - 13,800

- Prior education - Most have already earned a BA/BS
- Prior health care experience - 45 months
- New graduates – 5,600
- Majority of students are female - 72%
- Mean age of students - 27 years old

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION

PA education completed in 4-6 years  
• 2 to 4 years undergraduate prerequisite courses  
• 2 to 3 years PA professional program  
• Most programs award bachelor's or master's degree

Physician education completed in 11-13 years  
• 4 years undergraduate degree program  
• 4 years medical school with MD/DO degree  
• 3-5 years residency

Prerequisites to PA program (2-4 years)  
• Basic science courses  
• Prior health care experience  
• May require completion of BA/BS degree

Typical PA professional program is 24-32 months  
• One year didactic courses  
• One year clinical rotations

## Canada

**ISSUE:** Shortage and maldistribution of health care providers. Availability of military trained PAs and international medical graduates (IMGs)

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Train effective midlevel providers with appropriate, readily available substrate. Ongoing development of accredited PA training programs. Two programs are now open plus the ongoing of the military training.

## United Kingdom

**ISSUE:** Need to have more health care providers in the workforce to meet the new target goals of the NHS.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Four PA programs are up and running. University of Birmingham, St. George's Medical School at the University of London, University of Hartfordshire, and University of Wolverhampton. New graduates will be finishing up in 2009. Government has given funding for 180 students through out England.

## Netherlands

**ISSUE:** Initially the PA model was seen as a means to address widespread staffing shortages, but now it is more of a move to innovation, cost effectiveness, and improving the quality of medical care.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

There are 5 PA programs in the Netherlands, located in Nijmegen, Utrecht, Amsterdam, Groningen and Rotterdam, with a growing workforce of about 500 (professional and students.)

## China

**ISSUE:** Need for health care workers in rural areas to provide primary care

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Several consultative visits and conference presentations made on PA model in Beijing, Shanghai, and Wenzhou (2002-05)

## Australia

**ISSUE:** Australia is experiencing workforce shortages across multiple health professions despite a growing reliance on overseas-trained health workers. Shortages are particularly evident in rural and remote areas.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Representatives from the Health Innovation Advisory Subcommittee attended the 2007 AAPA conference. The University of Queensland's program began in 2009. A second program, at James Cook University, is slated to begin in 2011.

## Taiwan

**ISSUE:** Need for hospital-based providers

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT UTILIZATION

PA-type program started at Fooyin University in 2004.

## South Africa

**ISSUE:** Need for more health care providers to help in the shortage.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

There are four programs currently and four to open.

## India

**ISSUE:** Need for more health care providers to help in the shortage.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

There is one specialty PA program in Cardiothoracic surgery.

## Republic of Ireland

**ISSUE:** Improve the quality of 'doctors in training' (resident physicians) by off loading routine medical service tasks.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Consultation with US since 2006. Visit in Aug 2007 from the President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and representative from the Irish government's department of health to the Hahnemann/ Drexel PA program and several PA practice sites in Maine.

## Ghana

**ISSUE:** Need for upgrading medical assistant (MA) skills, who function in "PA" role in Ghana. "Brain drain" of Ghanaian trained doctors. Nursing shortage.

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT APPLICABILITY

Assist with upgrade of "PA like" providers in Ghana. Consultative visits with US based PA programs.

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT ORGANIZATIONS

Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) [www.PAEAonline.org](http://www.PAEAonline.org)

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

National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) [www.nccpa.net](http://www.nccpa.net)

Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) [www.arc-pa.org](http://www.arc-pa.org)