

What Is a Physician Assistant?



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The New York State Society
of Physician Assistants



What Is a Physician Assistant?

A Physician Assistant (P.A.) is a specially-trained health professional who works under the supervision of your doctor. This relationship enables the doctor and the P.A. to use their time and training most effectively and efficiently to provide you with comprehensive and personalized health care.

The concept of the Physician Assistant was developed in an effort to help meet the needs of millions of Americans who live in areas lacking adequate medical services. It is a team concept; the Physician Assistant and the doctor work *together* to provide better medical care for more people.

How and Where Are Physician Assistants Trained?

The first Physician Assistant training program was started in 1965 at Duke University in North Carolina. The first program in New York State began in 1970 at Brooklyn-Cumberland Hospital, which is affiliated with Long Island University. There are currently seven P.A. programs in New



York State and 50 throughout the country operating in medical schools, universities, and colleges. Each of these programs is accredited by the Council on Allied Health Education and Accreditation of the American Medical Association. Together, the programs graduate approximately 1,500 Physician Assistants every year. Approximately 150, or 10% of all annual graduates are trained in New York State programs.

What Kind of Training Does a Physician Assistant Receive?

Most Physician Assistant programs are two years in length. During this time, a student undergoes rigorous training in a broad curriculum of health care sciences geared to primary health care. Courses are followed by one year of working with patients in a clinical setting.

P.A. training does not stop at graduation. The National Board of Medical Examiners has developed a P.A. certification examination. It is administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. In order to maintain



this certification, a Physician Assistant must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years.

What Can a Physician Assistant Do?

The P.A. works with the doctor and other health professionals in a team approach emphasizing preventive and comprehensive medical care. P.A.s work in primary care as well as in a variety of medical and surgical areas. The Physician Assistant takes patient medical histories, performs physical examinations, and orders laboratory and other diagnostic tests.

The Physician Assistant may also diagnose and treat common medical problems and initiate emergency treatment. The P.A. also writes medical orders and prescribes medication and treatments. The doctor does not need to be physically present when the P.A. provides these services. However, the P.A. always works under the supervision of the physician who retains overall responsibility for the patient's care.

Where Do Physician Assistants Work?

Physician Assistants are currently employed in hospitals, clinics, private offices, prepaid health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and industry. Many P.A.s are practicing in areas of acute medical need, such as inner city and sparsely populated areas.

Why Are Physician Assistants Important to You?

When you seek health care, a Physician Assistant, working with your doctor, can help you to be seen faster, thereby decreasing your waiting room time and keeping your health care costs down. Thanks to the increased medical staffing, you are provided with health education and counseling to help you understand your health care needs.

How Can You Find Out More About P.A.s?

The New York State Society of Physician Assistants (NYSSPA) was incorporated in 1975 as the professional organization representing P.A.s in New York State. NYSSPA is a constituent chapter of the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA).

You may contact the NYSSPA at:



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