



# American Academy of Physicians Assistants

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

August 11, 1975

DONALD W. FISHER, Ph.D.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

David Glazer, M.A.  
Executive Director  
National Commission on Certification  
of Physician's Assistants  
3384 Peachtree Road, Suite 560  
Atlanta, Georgia 30326

Dear Mr. Glazer:

I am writing on behalf of the Academy to express our concerns relative to certification of physician's assistants by the National Commission. Let me preface my remarks by thanking you on behalf of the Board of Directors for addressing "certification and re-certification" at our July 12, 1975 Board Meeting in Washington, D.C.

The Board of Directors of the American Academy of Physicians' Assistants has recently reviewed the eligibility criteria for admission to the examination for primary care physician's assistants, as established by the eligibility committee of the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants. We find that under these guidelines, the surgeon's assistant is ineligible to sit for the examination. It is our position that these guidelines should be changed in order to allow the surgeon's assistant to take the above mentioned examination.

The Academy endorses the concept of the generic physician's assistant. It is the position of the Academy that just as physicians, including specialists, must display a common understanding of a core of medical knowledge with additional training for specialty areas, their assistants must possess a common core of knowledge. We think it apparent that this idea is shared by the American Medical Association's Council on Medical Education and the American College of Surgeons, as a review of the "Essentials of an Approved Educational Program for the Surgeon's Assistant" reveals a close parallel to that of the Essentials for the Primary Care Physician's Assistant. A comparison of the "Essentials of an Approved Educational Program for the Surgeon's Assistant" with the summary of health care functions to be tested from the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants brochure for the 1975 Certifying Examination reveals that all areas of the examination are covered in the surgeon's assistant education.

It is reasonable to assume that the average grade of the surgeon's assistant might not be the same as that of the primary care physician's assistant since a large portion of his/her training is in a specialty area; however, in view of the above facts, we are certain that the examination is still relevant to surgeon's assistants and that they should be allowed to take it. In fact, the failure rate among surgeon's assistants who took the examination in 1973 and 1974 is less than the national average.

Furthermore, it is the position of the American Academy of Physicians' Assistants that opening the Certifying Examination to the surgeon's assistant will be beneficial to the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants, health educators, and the surgeon's assistants. It will give the National Commission invaluable information regarding medical knowledge shared by the primary care P.A. and the surgical P.A. respectively. This information is obtainable at minimal extra cost and can be used in the development of future examinations, both in the core area and in specialty areas. Health educators would similarly benefit. It is, of course, the benefit to the surgeon's assistant that is of primary importance to the Academy.

Legislation in many states currently differentiates between a physician's assistant and a specialist assistant, the law being much more restrictive for a specialist assistant. One of the criteria for registering as a physician's assistant in these states is passing the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants Certifying Examination. It is an injustice to deny the surgeon's assistant this option by denying him admission to the examination.

The American Hospital Association in February, 1975 approved guidelines on the physician's assistant in the hospital. They recommended that consideration be given "the physician's assistant's eligibility to take and ability to successfully complete the Certifying Examination of the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants or an exam at least equivalent in scope and subject matter." In view of the present absence of an alternative examination, we believe that employment opportunities will be severely restricted if the surgeon's assistants are denied admission to the examination. Until a generic core examination is developed, there is no alternative but to allow the current examination to serve as a substitute. The "generic" National Commission can ill afford to continue to administer one specialty examination - that in primary care. Likewise, we realize the National Commission and the physician's assistant concept could not, at this point in time, withstand a proliferation of physician's assistants trained and certified to practice in the sub-specialties of medicine and surgery. In addition, the Academy realizes there is not a plethora of formally trained surgical assistants and that cost factors will have to be weighed, in part, in our decision making.

The American Academy of Physicians' Assistants requests the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants to reconsider their eligibility

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requirements and allow surgeon's assistants to sit for the 1975 and future certifying examinations. We humbly request immediate action by the Commission on this critical issue. I look forward to your reply, and in the meantime, if I may provide you with any further information, please feel free to contact me by phone (405/271-5048).

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Godkins, President  
American Academy of Physicians' Assistants

TRG/dm

cc: Directors, National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants  
Board of Directors, AAPA  
Board of Advisors, AAPA  
Liaison Advisors, AAPA  
Donald Fisher, Ph.D., Executive Director, AAPA/APAP  
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