

The Certification Standard

The Role, Qualifications and Value of Certified Physician Assistants



Certified physician assistants (PAs) are licensed and certified health care professionals who practice medicine with physician supervision and bring a breadth of knowledge and skills to patient care. Though their role in any particular workplace is determined in consultation with the supervising physician, certified PAs can take histories, conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order

and interpret tests, counsel on preventative health care, assist in surgery, perform a variety of procedures and write prescriptions.

Today, approximately 60,000 certified PAs practice in almost every setting and medical and surgical specialty, improving access to care for patients across the U.S. while providing invaluable support to all-too-often overextended physicians.



About PA Qualifications

Education

PAs are educated in nationally accredited didactic and clinical programs where they are trained in the medical model, an approach that facilitates the close working relationship PAs have with supervising physicians.

The average PA curriculum runs 26 months and includes classroom and laboratory instruction in the medical and behavioral sciences (such as anatomy, pharmacology, pathophysiology, clinical medicine and physical diagnosis), followed by rotations in internal medicine, family medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine and geriatric medicine.

Certification

Graduates of accredited PA programs become eligible for the **Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE)** administered by the National Commission on Certification of PAs (NCCPA). New grads must pass PANCE within six attempts and within six years of graduation.

To maintain NCCPA certification and use the PA-C[®] designation, certified PAs must log **100 CME hours** every two years and pass a **recertification exam every six years** throughout their careers. They must also adhere to NCCPA's **code of conduct**, which holds certified PAs to high standards of ethics and professionalism.

The vast majority of the members of this conscientious profession maintain certification throughout their careers. In 2005, for example, 96% of PAs met the requirements to maintain certification.



About the Value of PAs

Concerned about the patient load in your facility?

- 94.2% of PAs' employers* say that PAs **have helped increase the number of patients seen.**
- 92.5% agree that PAs have enabled them to **shorten the time patients must wait for appointments.**
- 91.2% say that PAs enable them to allow patients **more time to ask questions** during their office visits.

Employers also rave about the quality of PA care with more than 99% agreeing that PAs:

- provide **high-quality health care.**
- are **compassionate clinicians.**
- are **valuable members** of the health care delivery system.

**Results from 2005 NCCPA survey of health care employers who employ PAs; 308 responded to the questions cited here.*

Verifying PA Certification

The Physician Assistant-Certified[®] (PA-C[®]) designation conferred by NCCPA is required in all 50 states for initial licensure and in 23 states for licensure renewal and/or prescriptive privileges. Physicians, employers and third-party payers are also increasingly requiring PAs to maintain NCCPA certification in addition to their state-issued license. Maintenance of the PA-C credential represents a

commitment to lifelong learning and evaluation of knowledge and skills across a broad spectrum of medical and surgical areas.

To check a PA's certification status, use the **Verify PA-C** screen at *NCCPA Connect* (www.nccpa.net). Simply by entering the PA's last name and state, you can find the current status and expiration date for any PA's certification.

More on PA Certification & Recertification Exams

NCCPA's certification and recertification exams are generalist exams that are constructed using the highest testing standards. Test questions are written by committees of certified PAs and physicians and then edited by professional exam developers.



NCCPA's certification and recertification exams assess PAs' knowledge of all organ systems and infectious disease plus abilities in:

- History taking & performing physical exams
- Using lab & diagnostic studies
- Formulating most likely diagnoses
- Clinical intervention
- Pharmaceutical therapeutics
- Health maintenance
- Applying basic science concepts



Defining PA Competencies

Like physicians, the PA profession has engaged in critical introspection in response to IOM reports questioning the quality of available medical care and the public's growing interest in competence assessment within the medical and surgical professions. As a result, NCCPA and three other national organizations that are focused on the education and advancement of

PAs (the AAPA, ARC-PA and PAEA) developed a shared definition of PA competencies.

Taking a holistic view of PA practice and recognizing the breadth of competencies associated with medical practice, *Competencies for the PA Profession* addresses the areas of medical knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, patient care, professionalism, practice-based learning and improvement, and system-based practice. Those same organizations are now identifying opportunities to advance the development and assessment of those competencies among PAs, looking closely at education, training and assessment models used for physicians and physician specialists.



About NCCPA

NCCPA's mission is to assure that certified physician assistants meet professional standards of knowledge and skills. This not-for-profit organization is governed by a board of directors that includes public and PA directors-at-large and appointees from the following:

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Academy of Physician Assistants
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- American College of Physicians
- American College of Surgeons
- American Hospital Association
- American Medical Association
- American Osteopathic Association
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Department of Defense
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Federation of State Medical Boards
- Physician Assistant Education Association

Visit Us Online...

Visit www.nccpa.net for:

- The seminal document, *Competencies for the PA Profession*
- The *Code of Conduct for Certified and Certifying PAs*
- Verification of PAs' certification status
- More details about the PA certification process

More Information

For more information about certified physician assistants, contact NCCPA at:

12000 Findley Rd., Suite 200
Duluth, GA 30097
Phone: 678.417.8100
Fax: 678.417.8135
Web: www.nccpa.net
Email: nccpa@nccpa.net

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