

Research Priorities
for the
NCCPA Foundation Call for Research Grant Proposals
June 2009

The NCCPA Foundation's Research Grants Program supports research regarding the training, practice, employment, assessment and/or certification of physician assistants. The Foundation welcomes applications for grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 or up to \$25,000 for collaborative projects that support the purpose of its grants programs; financial support is limited to direct costs only.

The Foundation will consider applications that include a proposal completed in accordance with the requirements described in the *Research Grants Program Application Process and Requirements* document provided with this call for proposals. Funding is contingent upon an executed *NCCPA Foundation Research Grant Agreement*, which is also included with the application process and requirements document.

The deadline for submitting proposals is *September 1, 2009*.

Topics of Interest

The following topics are of great interest to NCCPA and/or the NCCPA Foundation. Proposals that address these topics will receive top priority consideration for funding.

Use of Standardized Patients in PA Programs

The four national PA organizations (NCCPA, PAEA, AAPA, and ARC-PA) collaborated to define the competencies needed for successful physician assistant practice. The resultant document, *Competencies for the PA Profession*, can be viewed online at http://www.nccpa.net/PAC/Competencies_home.aspx.

Having helped define six domains of PA competencies, NCCPA is engaged in a critical analysis of its existing certification and recertification programs as well as a review of assessment methods and certification programs used elsewhere in health care and beyond. During this review, use of standardized patients was identified as a particularly reliable way to assess many PA competencies, such as interpersonal and communications skills, that cannot be fully assessed by the current multiple-choice format of NCCPA's certifying or recertifying exams. Recognizing that the way standardized patients are used can vary extensively, NCCPA is interested in studying how standardized patients are currently used in PA programs. Results of such studies could help NCCPA identify opportunities to support and promote broader and more effective use of standardized patients.

The NCCPA Foundation has funded two research projects related to the use of standardized patients in PA programs. The reports from those projects were published in *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education* and are also posted on the NCCPA Foundation's Web site at <http://www.paexcellence.org>. A review of these studies will provide information on what has been done to date and may help identify potential research questions.

Specific questions of interest that remain include:

1. How are the content and standards of the simulations developed?
2. How is the quality of cases assessed, and how is the case presentation standardized?
3. At what point during the PA education program are standardized patients used and how frequently?
4. What is the overall cost to the PA program for utilizing standardized patients?
5. What barriers do PA programs face with utilizing standardized patients?
6. Review and describe how standardized patients could successfully be integrated into the PA curriculum including a recommended timeline, fiscal issues, facilities, faculty resources, and availability/training of patients.

PA Workforce and Practice Issues

With an increased awareness of the current and growing physician shortage, there have been a number of studies of physician workforce issues that could be replicated for the PA profession—studies that address the current use and projected need for PAs that could inform discussions about the current and future role of PAs in the U.S. healthcare system and/or the need for additional providers in various specialties or geographic areas. Along these lines, NCCPA is interested in gathering information on the value-added affect that certified PAs have in their respective practices as compared to their non-certified colleagues.

Specific questions of interest include:

1. Are there differences in malpractice cases between certified and non-certified PAs?
2. How satisfied are physicians with their PAs' performance? What are the value-added effects of having a PA in their practice (i.e., greater patient access, cost effectiveness, etc.)?
3. How are physicians working with their PAs to provide training or mentoring?
4. How are PAs utilized in their practices? Are there trends with different specialties, geographic regions, etc.?

PA Competencies: Development and Assessment

NCCPA continues to be interested in further defining entry, intermediate, and advanced levels of PA competencies and investigating other questions that will inform ongoing discussions about the most effective means of facilitating the development and assessment of various competencies.

Specific questions of interest include:

1. What level of competency is expected or required from entry level PAs and PAs with different levels of experience?
2. How do expectations or requirements differ among specialties or practice settings?
3. How should the competencies be evaluated over time within the evolving practice environment?
4. How can graduate PAs self-assess with respect to the competencies and use this information to develop and modify a life-long learning plan?

5. What CME choices are PAs making now, particularly in terms of whether they are pursuing CME in topics related to the specialty in which they practice? How do PAs' CME choices compare to their 20 most common diagnoses?
6. What is the PAs' level of understanding of "practice-based learning and improvement" and "system-based practice"?

The NCCPA Foundation has funded several projects related to PA competencies. One project related to incorporating the PA competencies into PA education and was published in *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education* and is also posted on the NCCPA Foundation's Web site at <http://www.paexcellence.org>.

Mission Statements and Goals

Those choosing to submit proposals on topics other than those outlined above are encouraged to select topics that support the mission or goals of either NCCPA or the NCCPA Foundation.

- *NCCPA's Mission:* NCCPA assures that certified physician assistants meet professional standards of knowledge and skills.
- *NCCPA's Goals:*
 - NCCPA will be an essential indicator of PA competence and will utilize a competencies-based approach to refine its certification and recertification programs and to develop new products and services for certified PAs.
 - Through the exchange of knowledge, expertise and resources with others, NCCPA will continue to enhance the reputation of the organization and the visibility of and appreciation for certified physician assistants.
 - NCCPA will use technology and research to be responsive, innovative, and effective in addressing the interests of the public and other stakeholders.
 - Through its partnership with the NCCPA Foundation, NCCPA will support research, education and other initiatives that promote excellence among certified physician assistants and benefit the public.
- *NCCPA Foundation's Mission:* The Foundation supports the work of the NCCPA for the advancement of certified physician assistants and the benefit of the public.
- *NCCPA Foundation's Purpose:* Through research, education and other initiatives, the Foundation will support the work of NCCPA to promote certified physician assistant excellence and, thereby, benefit the public.

- *NCCPA Foundation's Goals:*
 - Assist NCCPA in the pursuit of its organizational goals and outcomes by providing marketing and other support.
 - Educate physician assistants about issues related to professionalism and ethical decision making.
 - Articulate a vision of certified physician assistant excellence and inspire certified physician assistants to pursue excellence in all of their professional activities to improve the quality of health care.
 - Conduct and promote research within and about the PA profession that informs the further development of educational or assessment activities.

Possible Resource for Data

NCCPA is willing to work with researchers who are awarded grants to provide data in support of research projects. All data provided must be within NCCPA's information disclosure policy and with the exception of data that is public information, all data provided to researchers will be depersonalized. Examples of possible data available include length of certification, pass/fail rates on examinations, specialty areas of practice, CME courses logged, demographics (age, gender, region), etc. NCCPA's Research Policy is provided for review as part of the application document and is also available on the NCCPA Foundation's Web site at <http://www.paexcellence.org>.