Physician Assistant (P.A.)

What does a Physician Assistant do?

- Originally PA programs were created to train former military corpsmen to practice medicine and provide care for people with limited access to health care.
- In recent years, the field has opened to people from all backgrounds.
- Graduates of accredited PA programs are licensed by the state to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician.
- PA’s can perform such duties as physical exams, diagnosing and treating illness, ordering and interpreting lab tests, prescribing medication, suturing wounds, assisting in surgery, providing patient education and counseling, and making rounds in hospitals.
- Nearly 40% of PA’s practice in hospital settings. An equal number work in group and solo-physician offices. The rest are found in rural and community health centers, nursing homes, surgical facilities, school and college-based health centers, industry, and correctional facilities.
- All states now authorize PA’s to prescribe medication.

How do I become a PA?

- To attend one of the accredited PA programs, you will need a bachelor’s degree with any major of your choice as long as you have the appropriate prerequisite courses (see below).
- Generally you need considerable health care experience (generally hands-on patient care) to be admitted to most programs. Some require as many as 2,000 hours.
- Once in a program, you will study basic sciences, behavioral sciences, and clinical medicine.
- More than 2,000 hours are spent in clinical rotations including specialties in family medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, psychiatry, and obstetrics/gynecology.
- Training is competency based. Once clinical training is finished, you must pass the national PA certification exam and be licensed in your state.

What prerequisite courses do I need?

- Although PA programs do not have a standard set of requirements, there are many similarities in their requirements. See box below for these prerequisites.
- The initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as MD programs.
- Programs may also require/recommend courses in communications, statistics, physics, public speaking, medical terminology, and medical ethics.
- Course requirements can vary substantially between programs, you should look at possible programs to which you would like to apply early in your academic career to make sure you meet their requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prerequisite Course Equivalencies *</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalent (Specific courses may vary depending on major)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Intro Biology</td>
<td>BIOL 11000 - 11100 OR 13100 plus 23100/23200 (total 8 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300 - 20400 OR 30100-30200 plus additional course (usually need 8 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>BIOL 22100 OR 43800 - 43900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>CHM 11500 - 11600 OR equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organic</td>
<td>CHM 25500/25501-25600/25601 OR equivalent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>BCHM 56100 OR BCHM 30700 OR CHM 33300 OR CHM 53300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>PSY 12000 - some schools also require abnormal psych and/or developmental psych</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 30100 OR 50300 OR PSY 20100 OR SOC 38200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>COM 11400 OR COM 21200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Med. Terminology</td>
<td>HSCI 13100 (IUPEH program requires 2 credit hours - consider Ivy Tech course)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>NUTR 30300 OR 31500</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 OR 10800 - some schools require a second English course</td>
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</table>
What is the job outlook?

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Physician assistants rank among the fastest growing occupations, as physicians and health care institutions increasingly utilize physician assistants to contain costs.”
- Some studies have shown that PA’s save as much as 20% of the costs of medical care and can perform at least 80% of the functions in an ambulatory care practice.
- This means that the field will continue to grow as we seek ways to cut health care costs.
- Median pay for a PA in 2010 was $86,410.

Where can I get more information?

American Academy of Physician Assistants
http://www.aapa.org

Physician Assistant Education Association
http://www.paeaonline.org/

PA Focus
http://pafocus.org/

CASPA
https://portal.caspaonline.org/

Programs in Indiana

Indiana State University
http://www.indstate.edu/pa/program/admission-criteria.htm

IUPUI
http://shrs.iupui.edu/health_sciences/degrees/mpas/mpas.html

University of Saint Francis
http://www.sf.edu/healthscience/pa/

Butler University
http://www.butler.edu/physician-assistant/

For more information about Physician Assistant programs or your interests in the health professions, contact the Center for Pre-Professional Advising at 765-496-2690 or preprofessional@purdue.edu. More information about Health Careers can be found at www.explorehealthcareers.org and www.purdue.edu/preprofessional.

Information for this career guide came from the above websites and the Bureau of Labor Statistics
http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos081.htm

What else do I need to do before I apply?

- You need to shadow a PA to make sure this is the right field for you and that you truly understand what it is that a PA does.
- Most programs also require significant hands-on patient experience. This means that you should have worked in a health care setting doing—which may require additional training. Other options include working for hospice or in group homes. Speak with PA programs for more ideas.
- Some programs require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

How do I apply?

- The initial application to most PA programs is through an online application service called the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA).
- Your letters of reference may be submitted electronically and you are responsible for sending all of your college transcripts (along with a transcript request form) to CASPA for verification.
- Your online application will also include an application essay.
- Early application is recommended.