

Physician assistants (PAs) practice medicine under the supervision of physicians and surgeons. They should not be confused with Medical assistants, who perform routine clinical and clerical tasks. PAs are formally trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive health care services, as delegated by a physician. Working as members of the health care team, they take medical histories, examine and treat patients, order and interpret laboratory tests and x rays, and make diagnoses. They also treat minor injuries, by suturing, splinting, and casting. PAs record progress notes, instruct and counsel patients, and order or carry out therapy. In 48 States and the District of Columbia, physician assistants may prescribe some medications. In some establishments, a PA is responsible for managerial duties, such as ordering medical supplies or equipment and supervising technicians and assistants.

Physician assistants work under the supervision of a physician. However, PAs may be the principal care providers in rural or inner city clinics where a physician is present for only one or two days each week. In such cases, the PA confers with the supervising physician and other medical professionals as needed and as required by law. PAs also may make house calls or go to hospitals and nursing care facilities to check on patients, after which they report back to the physician.

The duties of physician assistants are determined by the supervising physician and by State law. Aspiring PAs should investigate the laws and regulations in the States in which they wish to practice. For information on a career as a physician assistant, including a list of accredited programs, contact: American Academy of Physician Assistants Information Center <http://www.aapa.org>

Many PAs work in primary care specialties, such as general internal medicine, pediatrics, and family medicine. Other specialty areas include general and thoracic surgery, emergency medicine, orthopedics, and geriatrics. PAs specializing in surgery provide preoperative and postoperative care and may work as first or second assistants during major surgery.

Education and Training

Physician assistant education programs usually last at least 2 years and are full time. Most programs are in schools of allied health, academic health centers, medical schools, or 4-year colleges; a few are in community colleges, the military, or hospitals. Many accredited PA programs have clinical teaching affiliations with medical schools.

Admission requirements vary, but many programs require 2 years of college and some work experience in the health care field. Students should take courses in biology, English, chemistry, mathematics, psychology, and the social sciences. Many PAs have prior experience as registered nurses, and others come from varied backgrounds, including military corpsman or medics and allied health occupations such as respiratory therapists, physical therapists, and emergency medical technicians and paramedics.

Basic Requirements

One Year of Biology	BIO 1/1L – Contemporary Biology BIO 2/2L – Introduction to Molecular Biology
One Year of Chemistry	CHEM 2 – General Chemistry I CHEM 10 – General Chemistry II
Additional Biology Courses	BIO 120/120L – General Microbiology BIO 161 – Human Physiology BIO 164 – Human Anatomy
Writing	WRI 10 - College Reading & Composition
Math	MATH 18 - Statistics for Scientific Data Analysis or MATH 32 - Probability & Statistics or PSY 10 - Analysis of Psychological Data
Social Sciences	ANTH 1 – Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology PSY 1 – Introduction to Psychology SOC 1 – Introduction to Sociology
Courses in the Humanities	Some schools require additional courses in arts, humanities and foreign languages.

It is the student's responsibility to know the required preparatory courses for the programs to which they apply. PA education includes classroom instruction in biochemistry, pathology, human anatomy, physiology, microbiology, clinical pharmacology, clinical medicine, geriatric and home health care, disease prevention, and medical ethics. Students obtain supervised clinical training in several areas, including family medicine, internal medicine, surgery, prenatal care and gynecology, geriatrics, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and pediatrics. Sometimes, PA students serve one or more of these rotations under the supervision of a physician who is seeking to hire a PA. The rotations often lead to permanent employment.

Physician assistants must have a desire to serve patients and be self-motivated. PAs also must have a good bedside manner, emotional stability, and the ability to make decisions in emergencies. Physician assistants must be willing to study throughout their career to keep up with medical advances.

Testing

The majority of schools require students to take the Graduate Record Exam. Additionally, a few schools require the MCAT. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the specific requirements of the school to which they are applying.

Schools in California

<u>USC Keck School of Medicine</u>	Master's Degree program
<u>Loma Linda University</u>	Master's Degree program
<u>Samuel Merritt University</u>	Master's Degree program
<u>Stanford University</u>	Associate's Degree and Certificate programs
<u>Touro University</u>	Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree programs
<u>UC Davis</u>	Certificate program
<u>Western University</u>	Master's Degree program