

Physician Assistant Occupational Outlook

Quick Facts: Physician Assistants

2019 Median Pay	\$112,260 per year; \$53.97 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	Master's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-Job Training	None
Number of Jobs, 2019	125,500
Job Outlook, 2019-29	31% (much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2019-29	39,300

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

What Physician Assistants Do

Physician assistants provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive healthcare services, as delegated by a physician. Physician assistants, also known as PAs, practice medicine on teams with physicians, surgeons, and other healthcare workers. They are formally trained to examine patients, diagnose injuries and illnesses, and provide treatment.

Duties

Physician assistants typically do the following:

- Take or review patients' medical histories
- Examine patients
- Order and interpret diagnostic tests, such as x-rays or blood tests
- Diagnose a patient's injury or illness
- Give treatment, such as setting broken bones and immunizing patients
- Educate and counsel patients and their families—for example, answering questions about how to care for a child with asthma
- Prescribe medicine
- Assess and record a patient's progress
- Research the latest treatments to ensure the quality of patient care
- Conduct or participate in outreach programs; talking to groups about managing diseases and promoting wellness

Physician assistants work on teams with physicians or surgeons; however, their specific duties and the extent to which they must be supervised differ from state to state.

Physician assistants work in all areas of medicine, including primary care and family medicine, emergency medicine, and psychiatry. The work of physician assistants depends in large part on their specialty and what their supervising physician needs them to do. For example, a physician assistant working in surgery may close incisions and provide care before and after the operation. A physician assistant working in pediatrics may examine a child and give routine vaccinations.

Some physician assistants make house calls or visit nursing homes to treat patients.

Physician Assistant Occupational Outlook Cont'd

Important Qualities

Communication Skills. Physician assistants must explain complex medical issues in a way that patients can understand. They must also communicate with doctors and other healthcare workers to ensure that they provide the best possible patient care.

Compassion. Many physician assistants are drawn to the profession by a desire to help people. They should enjoy helping others.

Detail Oriented. Physician assistants should be focused and observant to evaluate and treat patients properly.

Emotional Stability. Physician assistants, particularly those working in surgery or emergency medicine, should be able to work well under pressure. They must remain calm in stressful situations in order to provide quality care.

Problem-Solving Skills. Physician assistants need to evaluate patients' symptoms and administer the appropriate treatments. They must be diligent when investigating complicated medical issues so that they can determine the best course of treatment for each patient.

Work Environment

Many physician assistants work in primary care specialties, such as general internal medicine, pediatrics, and family medicine.

Physician assistants held about 125,500 jobs in 2019. The largest employers of physician assistants were as follows:

Offices of physicians	54%
Hospitals: state, local, and private	26%
Outpatient care centers	8%
Educational services: state, local, and private	4%
Employment services	1%

Physician assistant work can be both physically and emotionally demanding. Physician assistants spend much of their time on their feet, making rounds and evaluating patients. Physician assistants who work in operating rooms often stand for extended periods. Although the work can be stressful, helping patients can be rewarding.

Work Schedules

Most physician assistants work full time. Some work more than 40 hours per week. Physician assistants may work nights, weekends, or holidays. They may also be on call, meaning that they must be ready to respond to a work request with little notice.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Physician Assistants, on the internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm> (visited September 07, 2020)