

# Physician Assistant Information Sheet

## **Physician Assistant (PA) Program Requirements**

Admissions requirements vary widely from school to school. Students are encouraged to choose any major they are interested in pursuing. Below is a list of courses that may be required:

Human Anatomy and Physiology (Biology 124, 125)  
General Chemistry (Chemistry 211, 212)  
Biochemistry (Biology 483 or Chemistry 463)  
Microbiology (Biology 305/306)  
English (English 101, 201 or 302)  
Two Psychology Courses (Psyc 100, Psyc 211, Psyc 325)  
Math (depends on the school)

Other courses that may be required are organic chemistry, genetics, and medical terminology. Students may consult the American Association of Physician Assistants website at [http://www.arc-pa.org/Acc\\_Programs/acc\\_programs.html](http://www.arc-pa.org/Acc_Programs/acc_programs.html) to research the specific requirements of the schools to which they plan to apply.

Some schools require students to have 1,000 hours of direct patient care before applying for admission. Other schools do not require the experience, but highly recommend it. Below is a list of the types of experience that have been found to be acceptable to meet minimum program requirements. However, it is not exhaustive and students should contact each school to find out what kind of experience is acceptable.

Patient care associate, paramedic, radiation technologist, OR technician, EMT, medical technologist, pharmacy technician, RN, medical technician, LPN, orderly, nurse's aide, phlebotomist, ophthalmologic technician, dietician, home health aide, medical office assistant, mental health aide, veterinary technician, EKG/monitor technician.

## **Physician Assistant Program**

The typical PA program takes two years to complete. The majority of students have a BA/BS degree and some health care experience prior to admission to a PA program. The programs vary by school and may include master's degrees, bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, or a certificate. Some programs offer more than one option.

## **Physician Assistant**

Physician Assistants (PAs) provide healthcare services under the supervision of physicians. They work in doctor's offices, hospitals, clinics, HMO's, and the armed forces. Physician assistants are educated as generalists in medicine, and their education and credentialing are based on a primary care foundation. However, many PAs work in specialty fields, such as cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, and emergency medicine. The largest proportion opts for the primary care specialty areas of family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology. Some of the functions performed by a PA are:

- Taking medical histories
- Performing medical exams
- Ordering lab tests
- Diagnosing illnesses

- Counseling patients
- Assisting in surgery
- Prescribing medication (in most states)

### **Standardized Tests**

Most schools require students to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) which is a standardized test to gauge a student's ability to perform in a graduate program. The General Test is given year-round at computer-based test centers in the U.S., Canada, and many other countries. For more information about the GRE visit their website at <http://www.gre.org>.

### **Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)**

CASPA is a centralized service which allows applicants to use a single application process to apply to multiple PA programs. Not all schools participate in CASPA. It is the responsibility of the applicant to perform which schools participate and send individual applications to those schools that do not participate. For more information about CASPA, visit their web site at: <https://portal.caspaonline.org/>

### **Employment Outlook and Earnings**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, employment of PAs is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2012. According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the mean total income for PAs in 2006 was \$80,356. For those who have been in clinical practice for less than a year, the median salary was \$69,517.

### **Further Information**

The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Statistics- <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos081.htm>  
 American Academy of Physician Assistants-- <http://www.aapa.org/>  
 Virginia Academy of Physician Assistants--<http://www.vapa.org/>

### **Accredited Physician Assistant Programs in the Area**

Eastern Virginia Medical School-- <http://www.evms.edu/hlthprof/mpa/index.html>  
 James Madison University-- <http://www.jmu.edu/healthsci/paweb/>  
 Jefferson College of Health Sciences-- <http://www.jchs.edu/page.php/prmID/382>  
 Shenandoah University--  
<http://www.su.edu/academics/DFCD64526F494D40B183F1CDCA3C01EE.asp>  
 George Washington University-- <http://www.gwumc.edu/healthsci/programs/pa/>

### **Pre-Physician Assistant Advising**

The information contained in this information sheet should be discussed with a pre-health professional advisor. Pre-Physician Assistant advising is available by appointment at the Academic Advising Center located in SUB I, Room 304, 703-993-2470. Students must still be advised in their department regarding their major. Students may also go to the <http://prehealth.gmu.edu> website for more information.

The primary sources of information for this fact sheet were gathered from the American Academy of Physician Assistants web site and the Bureau of Labor and Statistic Occupation Handbook.