Methods and Strategies for Primary Care Workforce through Pipeline Integration

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Who Were the First PAs?

First PAs primarily recruited from navy corpsmen and army medics returning from Vietnam

- relatively large numbers of highly motivated individuals with previous military training
- usually possessed a great deal of practical, hands experience
- experience exceeded their formal education
The Physician Assistant Profession

- Established in 1965 at Duke University by Eugene Stead, MD a general internist

- Goal was to increase patient access to medical services in rural areas of North Carolina
What is a Physician Assistant?

- Not a physician
- They do practice medicine
- *With or under the supervision* of physician
- They do provide a wide-variety of medical services
What is a physician assistant?

A physician assistant (PA) is a medical professional who works as part of a team with a licensed physician. A PA is a graduate of an accredited PA educational program who is nationally certified and state-licensed to practice medicine with the supervision of a licensed physician.
What is a Physician Assistant?

- PAs are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision.
- Strong physician-PA team philosophy.
- There is a strong commitment to team practice.
- Approximately 108,000 PAs in clinical practice in 2017.
What Can PA’s Do?

- Scope of practice is largely determined by the supervising physician.

- Education in medical programs has prepared them to perform about 80% or more of the duties most commonly performed by a primary care physicians.
What can PAs do?

PAs perform:
- physical examinations
- diagnose and treat illnesses
- order and interpret lab tests
- perform procedures
- assist in surgery
- provide patient education and counseling
- make rounds in hospitals and nursing homes
- take call
- write prescriptions including narcotics (up to Sch. II)
Do PA’s Work in Different Kinds of Health Care Settings?

- YES! Absolutely. They practice in practically all health care settings and in nearly every medical and surgical specialty.

- They serve on the White House medical staff.

- Approximately 15% of PAs practice in rural communities with fewer than 10,000 people.
In What Settings are PAs Employed?

- Hospitals
- Clinics
- Emergency Rooms
- Operating Rooms
- Intensive Care Units
- Clinical Research
- Education
How are PAs educated and trained?

The PA educational program is modeled on the medical school curriculum, a combination of classroom and clinical instruction. The PA course of study is extremely rigorous and intense and is face to face education.

- 15 months are focused on didactic training.
- 12 months are focused on clinical training.
- The average length of a PA education program is 27 months.
Distribution of PA’s By Type of Health Care Setting

- 40% in family practice (primary care)
- 25% in Surgery (Subspecialties)
- 15% in Internal Medicine (Subspecialties)
- 10% in Emergency Medicine
- 4% in Pediatrics
- 3% in Women’s Health
- 3% in Occupational Medicine
What does a didactic year look like in PA Education?

**PA education includes instruction in core sciences:**

- anatomy
- physiology
- biochemistry
- pharmacology
- physical diagnosis
- pathophysiology
- microbiology
- clinical laboratory science,
- behavioral science, and
- medical ethics
What does the clinical year look like in PA education?

PAs also complete more than **2,000 hours** of clinical rotations.

Rotations include:

1. family medicine
2. internal medicine
3. obstetrics and gynecology (women’s health)
4. pediatrics
5. general surgery
6. emergency medicine
7. psychiatry
8. and 4 elective rotations
What About Quality of Care Provided by a PA?

- A study by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment concluded that “within the limits of their expertise, PAs provide care that is equivalent in quality to the care provided by physicians.”

- A recent Gallup poll showed that a majority of Americans endorse the use of PAs as their primary health care providers.
Where Are PA’s Educated?

- Specially designed physician assistant programs located at medical schools and universities, teaching hospitals, and through the Armed Forces.
- PA programs now graduate approximately 9,000 students/year.
- There are 233 approved and accredited programs in the US, with another 50 programs to begin enrollment between 2017-19.
- Due to the high demand there are approximately 35 new programs planned for 2020-21.
Are PAs Cost Effective?

Studies conducted by the Rand Corporation and other researchers found that PAs save as much as 20% of the personnel costs of medical care, can perform at least 80% of all functions in an ambulatory care practice, and are widely accepted by patients.
The UAB Physician Assistant Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham
School of Health Professions
Department of Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences
The UAB Experience

- Established in 1967 by John Kirklin, MD
  - cardiovascular surgeon
  - recognized the need for specialized assistant to the surgeon
- Second oldest PA program in the country
- Program has transitioned to a traditional PA program that trains PA’s to function in all health care settings.
- PA’s DO NOT specialize while in the program. They graduate as generalists. Very similar to a medical student prior to residency.
- PA’s are able to adapt to multiple healthcare settings.
The program maintains full accreditation as an entry-level Physician Assistant Master’s Program.

Accreditation is provided by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA)

UAB PA program is accredited until 2024.
Class Statistics

Master’s Degree in Physician Assistant Studies

- 2007 Clinical Class size-28
- 2008 Clinical Class size-32
- 2009 Clinical Class size-36
- 2010 Clinical Class size-32
- 2011 Clinical Class size-42
- 2012 Clinical Class size-45
- 2013 Clinical Class size-58
- 2014 Clinical Class size-70
- 2015 Clinical Class size-80
- 2016 Clinical Class size-90
- 2017 Clinical Class size-80
UAB Applicant Profile

- Average Age: 26
- Average Overall GPA: 3.57
- Average Math/Science GPA: 3.5
- Average Verbal GRE: 60%
- Average MCAT when utilized: 27
The Growing PA Profession

Opportunities for the PAs continue to expand, owing to many factors, including:

- Cutbacks in physician residency slots
- Laws requiring reduced resident work hours
- Increased reimbursement for PA services
- Ability of the PA to provide physician/surgeon relief of many routine duties
- Increased PA profession advocacy by organization such as the AAPA
Didactic Curriculum
First Year Curriculum

- Consists of didactic instruction in basic medical sciences, clinical sciences, physical diagnosis and technical skills.
- Very demanding curriculum!!
- The demanding curriculum is not due to the difficulty of material but pace and quantity of 24 months of medical education over 15 months.
Clinical Curriculum

- 44 weeks of rotations in clinical training
  - 7 required clinical rotations (6 medical and 1 surgical) of 30 days.
  - 4 elective rotations of 30 days (UAB does require a second surgical rotation different from the initial general surgery rotation).

- Most rotations are rigorous and require 40+ hours per week including call and weekends.
So do you add a Physician or Physician Assistant to your practice?

Key Differences:

- PAs are dependent practitioners (as are all APP’s in Alabama - they require a supervising or collaborating physician)
- Education requirements not as long as a physician (27 months vs. 48 months +/- residencies)
- Scope of clinical practice not as extensive in most cases for the physician assistant.
- But the huge advantage for the PAs is that they have more flexibility to change their practice setting and medical specialty throughout their career.
The Elephant in the Room

By 2020, the Association of American Medical Colleges projects the U.S. will be short 45,000 primary care physicians, especially in rural areas.

Who is going to fill the gap? Physicians (MD and DO), Nurse Practitioners or Physician Assistants? Will there be a need for all to contribute? What percentages?

The demand for the NP and PA providers (now referred to collectively as Advanced Practice Providers) by specialist is skyrocketing, pulling more APP’s away from primary care.

If the UAB PA program is going to contribute to the shortage how many students and in what settings are needed to be trained to meet the projected gap?
How to incorporate a PA student into a practice?

- We place over 900 clinical rotations per year.
- We have some clinical practices that take up to 10+ students per year.
- We have some clinical practices that only take 3-6 students per year.
- Each practice is different depending upon patient flow and desire to utilize students within the practice.
How to incorporate a PA student into a practice?

- Define the expectations initially with the student.
- Have a well thought out plan of who the student is to see and the difficulty of the patient.
- Allocate a reasonable length of time for the student to present the patient to the provider.
- Discuss the findings with the student then as a team discuss with patient.
- Confirm “positive” findings. Do not repeat the entire exam, especially nonessential components.
Will a student slow down your practice?

- That usually depends upon the preceptor not usually the student.
- Low confidence level by the preceptor in the student causes a preceptor to reevaluate every single finding or the entire history and physical.
- A student is probably as knowledge about medical or surgical content as they may ever be in their career. What they lack is application of the knowledge that leads to competence.
- Teaching students clinically means bridging the knowledge they have acquired with application to the patient situations. It means helping guide them to develop competence.
- It is expected in a teaching institution and occurs daily. But what students really need is practical application in private practice with patients.
So how many students does a preceptor need?

- We try to not send more than one student per clinical rotation.
- We encourage a preceptor to try a student a month or every other month and not exceed 6 per year initially.
- If a preceptor prefers students in the latter portion (second half) of their training we can try and accommodate that request.
- A student in month one is quite different from a student in month six or eight.
- Clearly setting expectations of performance will make a difference in how the student is incorporated into the practice and how productive they become over a month.
We have a great need for pediatric and women’s health!

- The reason we state this is that the shortage of pediatricians and OB/GYN’s (women’s health) in rural and medically underserved areas is critical and growing worst annually.
- Many counties within Alabama have neither a pediatrician or a OB/GYN and who is going to provide that care?
- Much of the care once provided by specialist has been shifted to the family practitioner who now must keep up with increasing changes in the delivery of care in the rural and underserved areas.
- The team approach with APP’s is growing fast and telemedicine is playing an increasing important role in cases involving oncology, complicated pregnancies and difficult pediatric cases.
- The students need to train as part of the team in these practices.
- The interest and desire to practice in the rural or underserved areas can only be instilled in a potential PA or NP when given the opportunity to practice in the area.
We need you. We hope you feel you need us.

- There is no doubt that the education of the nurse, physician, clinical laboratory scientist, mental health professional, nurse practitioner or physician assistant can only be accomplished in a joint fashion with our community-based physicians and training programs.

- The opportunities rest with you. We hope you have a desire to train a potential colleague. Whether one, two, six or more, each one is important to help address our shortages.

- We try to make it easy.

- We try to keep the practice disruptions to a minimum.

- We promise we provide well-trained students to the practices.

- We only ask that you take the time to teach them the “art of medicine”. That they cannot learn reading a text book or scanning the internet.
Questions?