

## Physician Assistant

### ■ Job Description

The physician assistant provides diagnostic and therapeutic health care so that the physician can spend more time on complex patient problems. Working under a physician's supervision, the physician assistant is qualified to carry out about 80 percent of the medical tasks traditionally handled by the physician. Physician assistants take medical histories, perform physical examinations, and order laboratory tests. After diagnosing a problem, the physician assistant develops and implements a treatment plan. When appropriate, the physician assistant confers with the supervising physician and other health professionals.

### ■ Job Settings

Physician offices, clinics, hospitals, extended care and correctional facilities, and health maintenance organizations. According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants, about one-third of all PAs provide health care to communities having fewer than 50,000 residents where physicians may be in limited supply.

### ■ Projected Need

Nationally and in Illinois, employment of physician assistants is expected to increase much faster than average through 2010. Physicians and institutions are expected to hire more PAs because they cost less than hiring a full-time physician. PAs also relieve physicians from some of the more routine duties and procedures. Telemedicine is a new technology that will allow doctors and PAs to consult on cases via television. This technology also increases the number of PAs that are hired, because it allows for supervision even when the doctor and the PA are not in the same office building.

Some states are placing limits on the number of hours physician residents can work at hospitals. Hospitals are likely to hire physician assistants to take over some duties that the residents once did. Employment opportunities are best in states that allow PAs a broader range of duties, such as the ability to prescribe medications. Opportunities are growing in areas of the nation that have trouble

recruiting physicians, such as rural areas or inner cities.

In Illinois, there were about 640 people employed in this very small occupation in 2000.

### ■ Salaries

Wages vary by specialty, such as surgery, emergency medicine, or family practice. They also vary by practice setting, area of the country, and the PA's experience. PAs in hospitals tend to earn higher wages than those working in offices or clinics.

Nationally, the median wage for physician assistants is \$30.75 per hour. Half of all PAs earn between \$23.90 and \$36.73 per hour. In Illinois, the median wage is \$22.46 per hour.

### ■ Related Careers

Nurse practitioner, surgical technologist, clinical nurse specialist, physician, podiatrist, optometrist, and dentist

### ■ Differences in Training

There are 130 accredited programs across the country. In Illinois, there are four physician assistant training programs. One is at an associate's degree level and is offered at Malcolm X College in Chicago. The others are at either the bachelor's or master's degree level. Most physician assistant programs require applicants to have previous health care experience and some college education. The typical applicant already has a bachelor's degree and over four years of health care experience.

Commonly nurses, EMTs, and paramedics apply to PA programs.

### ■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

*The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/>. You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.*

## Physician Assisting

### ■ **Credentials**

Physician assistants are certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants after passing an exam that assesses basic medical and surgical knowledge. Certification is required to practice in Illinois. Physician assistants maintain this certification by earning 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years. Recertification by exam is required every six years.

### ■ **Advanced Training**

The training for most physician assistants will not allow them to go to a medical school without completing more biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics.

### ■ **Resources**

American Academy of Physician Assistants  
950 N. Washington Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-1552  
Phone: 703.836.2272  
E-mail: [aapa@aapa.org](mailto:aapa@aapa.org)  
<http://www.aapa.org>

50-75 scholarships ranging in amounts from \$2,000 to \$3,000 are awarded annually to student members of the academy. Awards are based on financial need, academic achievement and goals.

Association of Physician Assistant Programs  
950 N. Washington Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-1552  
Phone: 703.548.5538  
E-mail: [apap@aapa.org](mailto:apap@aapa.org)  
<http://www.apap.org>