

# Texas Academy of Physician Assistants

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## Texas PA Facts

### **Who is TAPA?**

TAPA was established in 1975 and has represented physician assistants in Texas for all of those 30 years. TAPA is the official recognized organization of the American Academy of Physician Assistants. For more information on physician assistants please contact TAPA staff at (800) 280-7655.

### **What is a Physician Assistant (PA)?**

A physician assistant is a graduate of an accredited PA program who is academically and clinically trained to practice medicine with the supervision of a licensed physician. *Physician Assistants are trained as dependent health care professionals and work as part of the Physician-Physician Assistant team in the delivery of quality health care.*

### **What are PAs legally allowed to do?**

In Texas, all states, U.S. Federal Government and Uniformed Services, the District of Columbia, and the territory of Guam, physicians may delegate to PAs those medical duties that are within the physician's scope of practice, the PAs training and experience, and are allowed by law.

*Such duties include performing and physical examinations, diagnosing and treating illnesses, providing preventive medicine counseling and patient education, ordering and interpreting lab tests, suturing wounds, assisting in surgery, and making rounds in nursing homes and hospitals.* In Texas, 47 states, the federal government, plus the District of Columbia and Guam, physicians may delegate prescriptive privileges to the PAs they supervise.

### **How was the first PA program started?**

The PA profession was designed and developed by physicians in the mid-1960's. These physicians recognized the shortage of primary care physicians and the need for a health care professional to assist the primary care physician in the delivery of quality health care.

Dr. Eugene Stead, Jr., developed the first PA program at Duke University in 1965. *The PA program curriculum was designed in the medical model similar to that of physicians.* The first class consisted of military corpsmen and medics.

### **How does a person become a PA?**

There are over 130 accredited PA programs in the United States. They are located at medical colleges and universities, teaching hospitals and through the Armed Forces. There are 7 PA programs in Texas. The Accreditation Review Commission of Physician Assistant Programs (ARC-PA) accredits PA educational programs.

Prior to admission, a typical PA student has four years of college and over four years of health care experience. PA education is typically 25 to 27 months of intensive and comprehensive course work and PA students may take some of their classes with medical students. Most PA programs award a Master's degree.

### **What qualifies a PA to practice in Texas?**

To be licensed as a PA in Texas the PA must be a graduate of an accredited PA program, have passed the National Commission on Certification of Physician

Assistants, and be approved by the Texas State Board of Physician Assistant Examiners.

Once approved for licensure as a Physician Assistant, the PA is required to obtain 40 hours of continuing medical education yearly to maintain licensure

### **Do PAs have to pass a national board certifying examination?**

In the 50 states with laws covering PA services (including Texas), PAs are required to pass a national certifying board examination developed by the National Board of Medical Examiners and administered by the independent National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. PAs are licensed or registered by the state in which they practice.

Over 50,000 PAs are currently in clinical practice in the United States. *There are over 3,000 PAs licensed to practice in Texas.*

### **Where do PAs practice?**

Physicians, group practices, HMOs and outpatient clinics employ approximately 70% of all practicing PAs. Many hospitals faced with a shortage of physician resident's employ PAs to help meet their clinical service needs. PAs are working in virtually every type of medical and surgical specialty.

Most PAs in Texas practice in a primary care practice such as Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Obstetrics, and Gynecology, and Geriatrics. *In Texas, many of the states rural health clinics are staffed by PAs.*

### **What about reimbursement for PA services?**

Employers receive reimbursement for PA services under Medicaid, Medicare, third-party insurers (including managed care), and CHAMPUS.

### **And the quality of PA services?**

Studies conducted by RAND Corporation have found that PAs save as much as 20% of the costs of medical care, can perform most of the routine functions in a general medical practice, and are widely accepted by patients. PAs spend more time seeing routine cases and educating patients, freeing up the physician to handle more complicated cases.

Professional liability insurance premiums are low because PAs have been involved in very few lawsuits.

### **PA Education includes the following course curriculum in addition to clinical rotations:**

#### **Class/Lab Instruction**

Anatomy	Clinical Medicine Courses
Physiology	Medical Neuroscience
Pharmacology	Microbiology
Clinical Laboratory Sciences	Differential Diagnosis
Physical Diagnosis	Medical Ethics and Jurisprudence
Physical Examination	Medical Research and Statistics
Pathology	Preventative Medicine and Community Health
Psychology and Human Dynamics	Introduction to Clerkship
Clinical Methodology	