



A Qualitative Pilot Study of Physician Associates in Leadership Positions: Exploring the Pathways, Barriers, and Support Systems

Marcia Bouton, DMSc, MHPE, PA-C, DFAAPA, Midwestern University PA Program, AZ; Robert McKenna, DMSc, MPH, PA-C, Marshall B. Ketchum University, CA; Yolonda Freeman-Hildreth, PhD, PA-C, DFAAPA, University of Detroit Mercy, MI; Theresa Johnson, PhD, MSHSA, PA-C, Joseph Maxwell Cleland VA, GA; Ryann Piotrowski, MS, PA-C, Dartmouth Health, NH; Laura Chenevert, MMS, MPH, PA-C, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, NY.

Background

Healthcare provider leadership affects:

- Patient care^{1,2}
- Provider burnout^{3,4}
- Healthcare costs³⁻⁵
- Professional development⁶
- Career satisfaction⁶

PA satisfaction correlates with:

- Patient satisfaction^{3,4}
- Provider burnout^{3,4}
- Job turnover^{3,4}
- Healthcare costs and system inefficiency³⁻⁵

The purpose of the study is to better understand how to facilitate growth of PAs in leadership.



Conclusions

This pilot study shows that dedication, training, and networking are important pathways for leadership. Employers and PA organizations can provide adequate training, compensation, protected time, and autonomy to incentivize PA growth in leadership. Corporate, legal, and perceptual barriers exist. Celebration of PA leaders may increase the perception that PAs are appropriate for leadership roles. Future research should focus on PA leadership development with intent to collect data on a more diverse population.

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Results

Demographics:

64% female, 93% White, 7% Hispanic, 71% 13-23 years of experience as a PA.

Leadership pathways:

- Dedication to service
- Networking
- Employer-led pathways
- Training

Motivated or repelled by issues related to:

- Compensation
- Time
- Autonomy

Barriers:

- Corporate and legal
- Urban setting
- Perception of PA role

Advice to other PAs seeking leadership:

- Be altruistic
- Have growth-oriented mindset
- Be a self-promoter

"the benefit is paving the way, hopefully for new, more opportunities and like having a seat at the table and showing the value of how PAs can contribute."

"I can't supervise somebody who would clinically supervise me."

"[there is a] lack of expectation for PA's to be in leadership."

"I think the best benefit [...] it lets me affect change and alter the decisions or impact the decisions in my organization"

"We have struggled with our health system bylaws." recently our bylaws were adjusted or amended to allow APPs on the medical staff with voting privileges

"if you're in a position or a person who has a lot of privilege, you know, make sure you recognize that. And use that to the benefit of others."

Methods

- This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted by members of the AAPA Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives (RSI). RSI members conducted one-hour semi-structured interviews of 20 PA leaders who were in groups of 2-6 participants each.
- Participants were recruited from the AAPA 2022 PA Practice Survey if they indicated they were in a leadership role and were willing to participate in research. Additional recruitment of PA leaders was performed based on professional contacts of the RSI.
- Using grounded theory, transcripts were coded, and rich saturation of themes was identified. Cohen's kappa of 0.51 showed moderate interrater agreement.
- This study was approved by Midwestern University, Glendale, IRB, and all participants signed written, informed consent.

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Contact

Marcia Bouton
Mbouto@midwestern.edu