

Prevalence of Additional Master's and Doctoral Degrees in Top Advanced Practice Leaders

Hadley Powless, *Consulting Manager*
 Joel Villegas, *Consulting Manager*
 Amy Noecker, *Principal and APP Workforce Practice Leader*
 Zachary Hartsell, *APP Workforce Practice Leader*



In the past ten years, top Advanced Practice Provider (APP) leadership roles have evolved in both scale and scope - including a shift in focus from operations to more strategic initiatives. During this same timeframe, doctoral programs for both Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) and Physician Associates (PAs) have also become more prevalent. SullivanCotter sought to find a correlation between APP leadership roles and additional advanced degrees.

Purpose:

With the rise of both APP leadership roles and structures, questions about the necessity of additional education have surfaced. APPs who might seek executive leadership roles in the future are curious to know if they should consider additional training or certification. Previous studies have attempted to define the additional degrees obtained by APP leaders in general but were not focused on the top advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) or physician associate (PA) roles specifically.² This study seeks to report insights on the prevalence and type of additional degrees held by top APP leaders.

Methods:

SullivanCotter's National APP Advisory Council is an affinity group whose member organizations include some of the largest APP employers in the US. Each organization is primarily represented by the top APP leader. Using the NAAC roster of 79 top APP leaders, online searches were performed to obtain data. This included professional profiles from the member organizations' websites in addition to LinkedIn profiles. Published articles with incumbent credentials were also used when available. The analysis included descriptive statistics and observations.

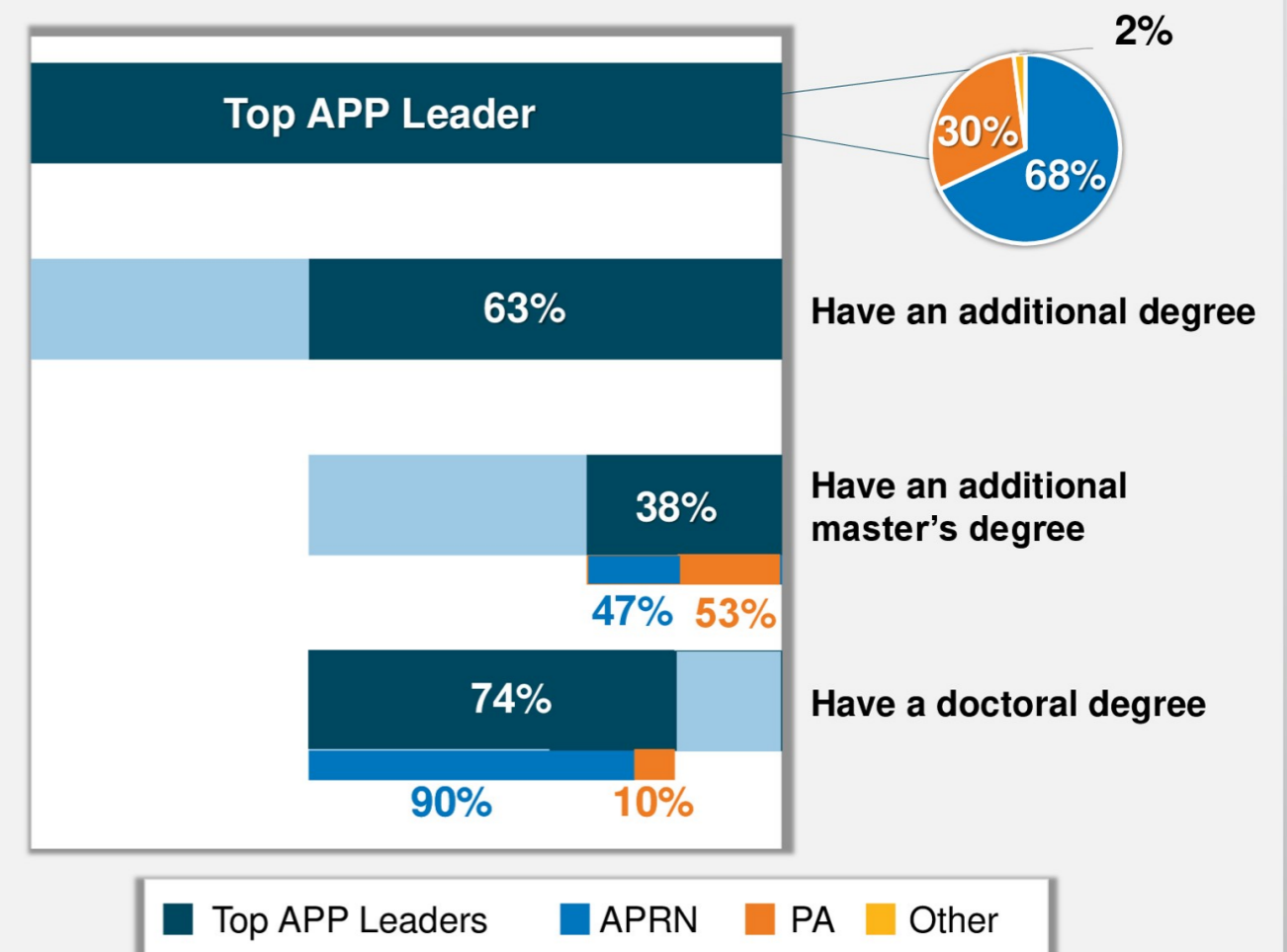
References:

- Noecker, A., Hartsell, Z., (May 8, 2021). Advanced Practice Provider Leadership: The Evolution of a Well-Defined Structure. *Physician Leadership Journal*. <https://www.physicianleaders.org/articles/advanced-practice-provider-leadership-evolution-well-defined-structure>
- Hartsell, Z, Pickard, T. (2015). Physician assistants in administration. *JAAPA*. 28(11), 1. https://journals.lww.com/jaapa/citation/2015/11000/physician_assistants_in_administration.25.aspx
- Kayingo, G., Kibe, L., Gordes, K.L. and Cawley, J.F. Assessing demand for doctoral-prepared PA faculty: a five-year longitudinal study. *BMC Medical Education*. 22,331. <https://bmcmmededuc.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12909-022-03375-x>
- McCauley, L.A., Broome, M.E., Fraizer, L., Hayes, R....Villarruel A.M. (2020). Doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degree in the United States: Reflecting, readjusting, and getting back on track. *Nursing Outlook*. 68(4), 494-503. [https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554\(20\)30006-3/abstract](https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554(20)30006-3/abstract)

Results:

- Out of 79 top APP leaders, **68% were APRNs**, **30% were PAs**, and one leader identified as a PharmD
- Review of advanced degrees found that for APP leaders with a Master's level clinical degree, **63% also held an additional degree**
 - Of those leaders with additional degrees, **38% have a secondary Master's degree** in either business, health administration, or public health (MBA, MHA, or MPH respectively)
 - The **MBA degree** was the most common Master's degree followed by MPH, then MHA
 - 53%** of those who had an additional Master's degree were **PAs**
- 74%** of top APP leaders with an additional degree have a **doctoral degree**
 - Degrees reported included Doctor of Medical or Health Sciences (DMSc or DHS respectively), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
 - Of those with doctoral degrees, DNP was the most prevalent**
 - 90%** of those with doctoral degrees were **APRNs** and **10%** were **PAs**

Credentials of Top APP Leaders



Conclusion:

The data demonstrates a high prevalence of doctoral and nonclinical Master's degrees in top APP leaders compared to their respective clinical workforces.^{3,4}

While additional education is not required for top APP leadership roles, it seems to be a common characteristic of top APP leaders. Additional research should be considered related to the motivations and competencies needed in these roles.