



# IDENTIFYING ARMY PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT FOCUS FOR THE SECOND PA HANDBOOK: ADVANCING THE PA PROFESSION BY SHARING LESSONS LEARNED



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## Introduction

For over 50 years, Army PAs have supported the US Army by ensuring the military force is ready to fight tonight and prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. Since the inception of the PA profession, military PAs have demonstrated that they are versatile and adaptable force multipliers needed in a variety of environments ranging from clinical settings to combat outposts.

The role of the Army PA has changed since the early 1990s when they first became commissioned officers. Over the years, PAs have molded to the current needs of the Army. That evolution is captured and commemorated in the PA Handbook.

Army PAs provide a wide range of care at each level, or echelon of care; from emergency and life-saving treatment at the point of injury, to routine care or wellness visits, to specialty services such as orthopedics, emergency medicine, general surgery, behavioral health, and in staff and command roles at various levels and organizations throughout the Army.

## Purpose

In the last 50 years, PAs have met and exceeded the original intent for providing battalion level care on the battlefield and in garrison. They have developed specialties and residencies and are sought out for leadership positions.

The purpose of this initiative was to solicit feedback for improvement to the second handbook. The second handbook addresses topics, experiences and opportunities, and gaps in PA knowledge that exist that were not in the first handbook.

## Background

The Physician Assistant (PA) Handbook, now in its second edition, originated from the need to understand the diverse roles of the PA, provide career guidance, inform of opportunities, and share lessons learned with current and future physician assistants.

The first handbook satisfied this great need, while also providing the history of Army PA beginnings.

The second handbook is an update of the first edition that incorporates new roles and opportunities that have emerged since 2015. It signifies a "labor of love" to showcase PA foundations and recognize the advancements of the PA profession.

This handbook serves as a chronological time capsule, a portrait in space and time. It depicts a thriving Army PA ready medical force that stands prepared to answer the nation's call; any place, anytime.

## Method

This was a process improvement qualitative method of requesting feedback from current and retired Army PAs. The expertise of those solicited is inherent in their experience as Army PAs. The internal team identified four key questions to solicit feedback from Army PAs. The questionnaire was announced via social media open source platforms as an open call for participation.

## Questionnaire: Four Questions

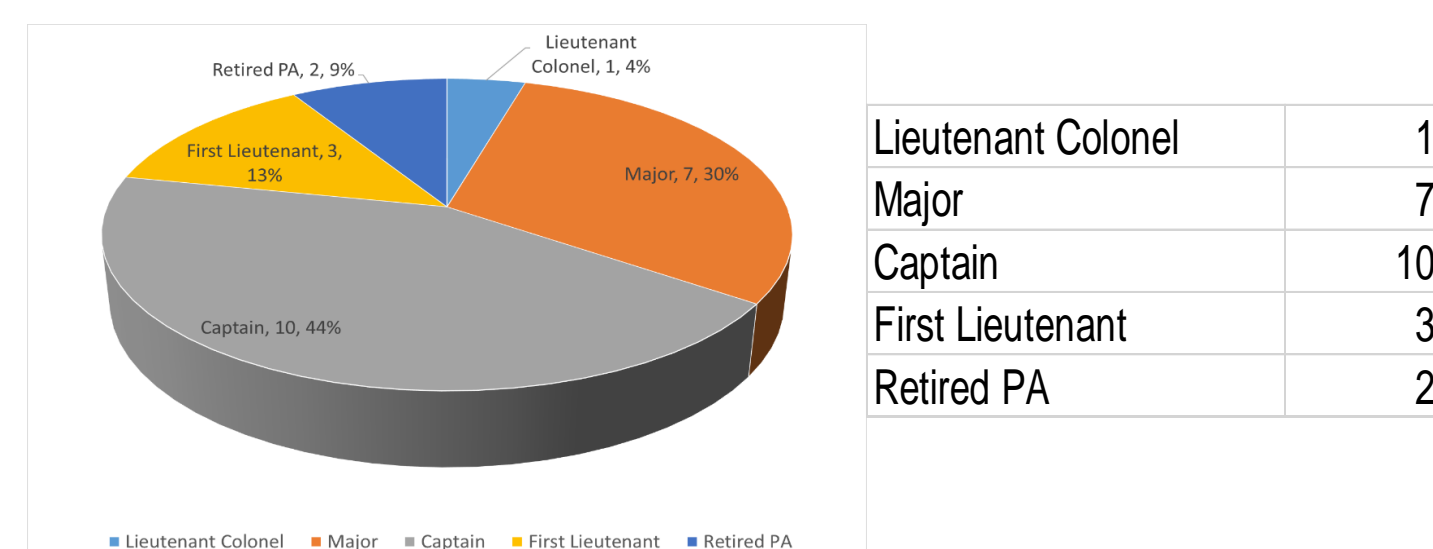
1. What other topics should be included in the second PA handbook?
2. What are the gaps in our knowledge?
3. What experiences or opportunities would benefit Army PAs?
4. Who are the individuals with unique experience or expertise that could help with the handbook?

## Results

There were 23 Army PAs (N=23) that responded to the questionnaire.

1. To address the new topics, feedback was received that PA roles and positions not covered in the first handbook should be included. There was also mention of including preparation for civilian practice, prolonged field care and AGR (Active Guard Reserve) positions.
2. To address the gaps in knowledge, PAs requested information on medical readiness and updated information on IDES (Integrated Disability Evaluation System), the MEB (Medical Evaluation Board) process, and the business of medicine.
3. Experiences and opportunities mentioned were teleconsultation, broadening opportunities, the challenges of relationships between OCONUS (Outside Continental United States) stationed PAs and local hospitals.
4. For expertise and guidance, PAs requested tips from HRC (Human Resources Command) and battalion PAs regarding talent management.

## Demographics of Respondents



## Q1. Other topics for the second PA Handbook

What other topics should be included in the second PA handbook?

- New PA positions after battalion level and broadening assignments
- Glossary of relevant websites
- Awards for PAs
- OER (Officer Evaluation Report) guidance
- Preparation for civilian practice (retirement and leaving the service)
- Fresh whole blood transfusion
- REBOA (Resuscitative Endovascular Balloon Occlusion of the Aorta)
- Prolonged Field Care
- New options for Long Term Health Education and Training

## Q2. What are the gaps in our knowledge?

What are the gaps in our knowledge?

- The IDES, MEB process, and profile limitations
- Battalion/Brigade PA Operational roles and TTPs (tactics, techniques and procedures)
- "Outside the Box" Career Opportunities
- Unit Physical Readiness
- Occupational Health Medicine
- The Force Management System
- Business of Medicine



COL David Hamilton (far right), The Army Surgeon General's PA Consultant joins US Military/Baylor Doctor of Science in Physician Assistant Studies Graduates, Faculty and Staff (Photo courtesy of COL Hamilton)

## Q3. Experiences and Opportunities

What experiences or opportunities would benefit Army PAs?

- Teleconsultation
- Expeditionary Medicine
- Different career tracks/career paths for Army PAs
- Civilian CME (continuing medical education) conferences
- Transitioning from military
- Career paths and broadening opportunities
- Role 1 Aid Station Operations
- Importance of mentorship and networking
- Dealing with local hospitals (OCONUS)
- Long Term Health Education and Training
- Joint Trauma System



LTC John Detro assumes command of the 187<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion at JBSA-Fort Sam Houston, Texas (Photo courtesy of MEDCoE PAO)

## Q4. Individuals with Experience and Expertise

Who are the individuals with unique experience or expertise that could help with the handbook?

- Senior PAs with battalion- and brigade-level command experiences
- 82<sup>nd</sup> Division PA
- ARTB (Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade) PAs
- Long Course ILE (intermediate level education)



MAJ Sean Donohue briefs LTG Nadja West, the 44<sup>th</sup> Army Surgeon General, during her visit at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California (Photo courtesy of NTC PAO)

## Discussion

Several chapters were added based on feedback from respondents. These include telehealth, broadening opportunities, OCONUS barriers to care, expertise from HRC, talent management, treatment of preventable deaths, and lessons learned by retired PAs. These chapters provide more depth and breadth to enhance Army PA knowledge. The second edition of the Army PA Handbook is an important publication of historic and practical importance. This second edition assists current and future Army PAs in recognizing the importance of their profession. The team provided a concerted effort to include civilians and all Army components (Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve). All chapters, included those updated from the first edition include lessons learned and tips for success. This initiative also provided an opportunity for mentorship and experience in publishing to all the contributors.

## Conclusion and Future Steps

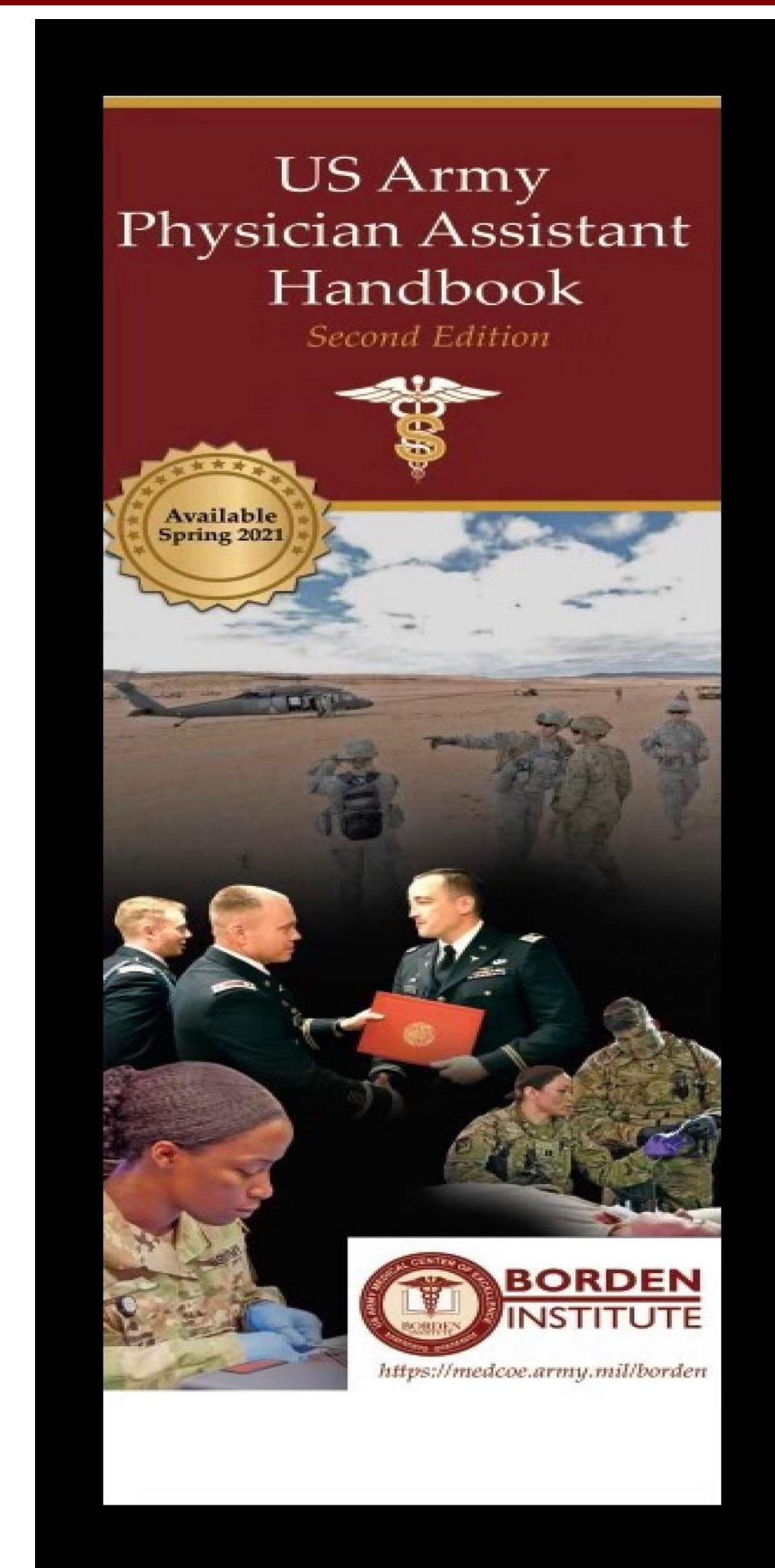
The second PA Handbook is scheduled to be published in mid-2021. It was important for the internal team to receive feedback from current PAs. The internal team identified 31 new chapters that are included in the second handbook, with a total of 70 chapters. The 39 chapters from the first edition were also updated. Future steps are to provide continued mentorship and publication of subsequent editions of the handbook; include the handbook as part of education and training curricula; and to continue efforts in highlighting the contributions of Army PAs of the past, present, and future.

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Advertisement scroll for the second edition of the US Army Physician Assistant Handbook (Image courtesy of Borden Institute PAO)