



Guide for New Physician Assistant Employers

Deciding to Hire

One of the most valuable attributes of the physician assistant (PA) profession is the flexibility in role and function of the PA within the dynamic model of the practice team. PAs can provide versatile medical care in all settings and specialties because of their broad general medical education. Hiring a PA means gaining an extra set of skilled hands, eyes, and ears. PAs offer an array of benefits to practices and physicians, including higher revenues, improvements in patient satisfaction via accessible care, and more flexibility in the schedules of their employers.

Knowing what your practice or institution needs is the first step in making the most of having a PA on the team. Where would your practice most benefit from this assistance? A thorough analysis of your current practice needs and your patient population is time well spent and will help you find the physician assistant who will be the perfect fit.

Preparing to Hire

Create a Job Description

Begin by developing a detailed job description that reflects the needs of your practice. Be sure to involve the physician(s) who will be working with the PA(s) and consider their practice styles and specialties. Do you seek a new graduate or a practiced veteran? Newly graduated physician assistants usually require close mentoring for the first few months of their employment; this is generally not the case with more experienced PAs.

The job description should address the following issues: Will the PA see all patients, just follow-up patients, or all first-time patients? Will they establish their own patient panel? Would you like the PA to make hospital rounds? Assist in surgery? Take call?

Read Your State PA Practice Act

Well in advance of hiring, familiarize yourself with your state PA practice act — especially its provisions concerning supervision, prescribing, and delegation. A summary of PA regulations and contact information for all state medical boards is available at www.aapa.org.

Understand PA Credentialing and Privileging

Perform a thorough credentials check on the candidate. One excellent way to verify credentials is through the AMA Physician Profile Web site at <https://profiles.ama-assn.org/amaprofiles/>. It provides all the necessary information on a PA's education; graduation; national certification status; current and historical state licensure information; and legal name, address, and date of birth. This information meets the Joint Commission's primary source requirements.

During the hiring process, request the following from the PA:

- A copy of his or her current state license (with license #, DEA # if applicable, and expiration dates)
- A copy of current certification from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).
- PAs will get a certificate each time they recertify. This will have the NCCPA #, issue date, and expiration date.

- Letters of reference from previous employers and colleagues — particularly peer recommendations and physician evaluations regarding the performance of specific responsibilities (i.e., surgical skills or other special skills)
- Documentation of CME records or additional training the PA has received, e.g., current ACLS, BLS, PALS, or other Certificates
- A copy of any recent hospital privileges. If the PA has a log documenting specific procedures, request a copy.

Inquire of the local hospital(s) about their policies regarding PA practice. Have PAs worked in the hospital before? Have they been privileged? If so, what are the procedures for privileging? How long will it take? Are there any physician cosignature requirements? Are competency measures used for any procedures the physician may want to delegate to the PA? What are the admission policies of the hospital? What are the policies on initial consultation in the hospital? Knowing the institution's policies on PA utilization in advance will save time and prevent surprises and frustration.

Building a Successful Team

Once the PA is on board, the PA and physician(s) together should create a delegation agreement that flexibly defines the clinical partnership, taking into account the state laws and regulations. The physician(s) and PA should discuss this document at least once a year and revise it as needed. A template delegation agreement is available on the AAPA website at <http://www.aapa.org/>. Communication is the key to successful healthcare teams; AAPA features guidance and resource materials to maximize it.

Educate Staff and Patients

The front office staff sets the tone for patient perception of providers. It is important that they understand that the PA is your medical partner. Educate staff to present the option of seeing a PA as a positive one. For example, they could explain that PAs allow for quicker appointments and that PA care is closely coordinated with the physicians. We suggest visiting the AAPA website (www.aapa.org) for some information that is perfect for educating all members of the practice or institution, from front office staff to fellow physicians, about the education, qualifications, and unique role of PAs.

Having the physician personally introduce the PA to each patient at the first encounter is an effective way to build patient trust. Consider sending a letter to patients introducing the new PA, explaining the PA's background, and generally describing how the physician and PA will practice together. In addition, printed information about PAs should be available in the office for patients to read and take with them.

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Having a PA on board is an asset to your practice.

Promote your new PA as the benefit to patients and fellow providers that he or she is!