

The Importance of Physician Assistants for American Healthcare



Taking care of patients is often a team effort. Gone are the days where a doctor was the only one involved in a patient's care. Today medical care often involves a team of professionals including nurses, technicians, and therapists.

The role of a PA

Physician assistants emerged in the 1960s as a response to a shortage of doctors. In some specialties, such as family practice, there continues to be a shortage, especially in certain communities. Physician assistants continue to fill a need.

But that's only part of why physician assistants are important to the healthcare system. During the last 60 years, the role of a PA has expanded. Currently, physician assistants work in most areas of medicine that doctors work. For example, PA's work in cardiology, oncology, and pediatrics. They also work in emergency medicine, general surgery, and gynecology.

Even in medical specialties where there is plenty of doctors, PAs are an important part of a practice. Physician assistants don't take away from doctors. Instead, they decrease some of the routine work for doctors and ease their load. That means doctors can make the most of their office hours and see more patients.



Becoming a PA

To become a doctor, it requires seven plus years of schooling. Once a doctor completes a residency in a particular specialty, it would take more training to move into something else. For example, if a doctor wants to move from family practice to emergency medicine, they would have to complete another residency to become board certified. A PA can move into different specialties easier, which means they can fill community needs.

Physician assistants also provide quality care that is cost effective. Although they don't have the same length of training as a doctor, they can do many of the same things. PA's can examine patients, order diagnostics tests, perform certain procedures and order treatment. They can also educate patients and be involved in preventative medicine. But they do it at less of a cost that medical doctors, which benefits patients and the entire healthcare system.

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