



# Kentucky's PAs: Bridging the Gap

Kentucky's Physician Assistants (PAs) deliver an invaluable service to the commonwealth – a service ever increasing in demand with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Since this landmark healthcare policy debuted more than 400,000 Kentuckians have become insured. Given the concerning shortage of providers in the Commonwealth with the record number of citizens that now have access to care we at the Kentucky Academy of Physician Assistants hold the position that by the providing the unique kind of patient relationships afforded to PAs we are better able to serve the citizens of Kentucky and advance outcome-based, patient-centered care here in the commonwealth.

## About Physician Assistants

PAs are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and can write prescriptions in all states and the District of Columbia. Within the physician-PA relationship, PAs exercise autonomy in medical decision making and provide a broad range of diagnostic and therapeutic services. This affords physician-PA teams a great deal of flexibility and their approaches to patient care. There are more than 123,000 practicing PAs nationwide.

Like physicians, PAs are trained in the medical model in educational programs that are located at medical schools, teaching hospitals, academic medical centers and in military medical centers. Practicing in physician-directed teams, PAs work in all medical and surgical specialties, in a variety of practice, educational

and research settings. The average length of a PA educational program is about 27 months with most PA students having attained bachelor's degree and nearly two years of health care experience prior to being admitted to a program. Physician assistant education is characterized by an intense yet practical curriculum, with both classroom and clinical components.

The didactic year of PA education provides a broad grounding in medical principles with a focus on their clinical applicability. The didactic year instruction typically consists of coursework in the basic sciences, including anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, physical diagnosis, pathophysiology, microbiology, clinical laboratory sciences, behavioral sciences and medical ethics. In their clinical years, students receive hands-on training through a series of clerkships or rotations in a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings. Rotations often include family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, general surgery, emergency medicine and psychiatry. Physician assistant students complete, on average, more than 1,500 hours of supervised clinical practice prior to graduation. Beyond graduation PAs are required to complete 100 hours of continuing education every two years and sit for recertification every 10 years.

Currently there are more than 1,640 licensed PAs in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and four accredited PA programs located at The University of the Cumberlands Williamsburg, University of the Cumberlands Northern Kentucky, University of Kentucky (including the Morehead satellite campus), and Sullivan University. These highly-trained medical professionals are committed to practicing medicine as part of physician-led teams.



## KENTUCKY ACADEMY OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

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## Per Capita Healthcare Expenditures



Source: Kaiser Health Foundation 2013-2014

### PA's Benefits to Kentucky

PAs can fill the gap between those who now have access to care and the number of medical providers available to treat them especially in rural areas where demand is growing due to the Affordable Care Act. Greater access to care means better preventative care to combat Kentucky's primary healthcare concerns. According to 2014 data from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Kentucky spends more per capita on healthcare than other southern state except Florida, while charting patient outcomes that are far worse than almost every state in the union. In fact, Kentucky carries among the highest rates of diabetes, obesity and heart disease.<sup>1</sup>

Over 40 percent of Kentucky residents reside in rural areas. Our commonwealth is also fortunate to have two programs, one at the University of Kentucky Morehead campus and the other at the University of the Cumberlands, focused specifically on rural healthcare. Increased demand for healthcare providers will bring

more students through these programs and help retain that valuable talent here in the commonwealth. Expanding access to care could save more than \$500—and in some cases, up to \$2,000—in patient charges while maintaining the same quality of care, benefiting patients and struggling rural hospitals alike. According to one study, patients in an emergency care setting seen by PAs reported a 93 percent satisfaction rate.

To make Kentucky a more attractive environment for new graduates, the Kentucky Academy of Physician Assistants (KAPA) has advanced a legislative agenda to open the field of physician assistant by increasing the number of PAs a doctor can supervise (KRS 311.854-5) and revising the co-signature requirement to allow a supervising physician to dictate the number of charts they cosign (KRS 311.856-10). In 2020, PAs in Kentucky were successful in achieving prescriptive authority for Schedule III-V controlled substances. KAPA worked with the legislators to prioritize passage of the bill as the commonwealth came to grips with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislation was passed by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in both chambers, insuring that PAs are able to practice to their full scope and respond effectively to health emergencies and address the critical provider shortage in our most vulnerable rural populations.

KAPA is proud to represent the hard-working PAs across the bluegrass state. Please visit [www.kentuckypa.org](http://www.kentuckypa.org) for more information about KAPA, physician assistants and to get involved in advancing outcome-based, patient-centered care in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). (2007). Retrieved August 30, 2018, from NCCPA Website: <http://prodcmststoragea.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/files/2017StatisticalProfileofCertifiedPhysicianAssistants%206.27.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Physician Assistant Education Association, By the Numbers: Program Report 32: Data from the 2016 Program Survey, Washington, DC: PAEA; 2017. doi: 10.17538/PR32.2017. Retrieved August 30, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Physician Assistant Education Association, By the Numbers: 30th Report on Physician Assistant Educational Programs in the United States, 2015, Washington, DC: PAEA, 2015. doi: 10.17538/btn2015.001. Retrieved August 30, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. (n.d.). *Maintaining Certification*. Retrieved August 30, 2018 from NCCPA: <http://www.nccpa.net/become-certifiedpa.net/become-certified>

<sup>5</sup> Foundation, K. F. (n.d.). *Health Care Expenditures per Capita by State of Residence*. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/health-spending-per-capita/>

<sup>6</sup> McCann, A. (2018, August 6). *Best & Worst States for Health Care*. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from WalletHub: <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-best-health-care/23457/>

<sup>7</sup> Timothy M. Capstack MD Cissy Segujja, M. M.-C. (2016, October). A Comparison of Conventional and Expanded Physician Assistant Hospitalist Staffing Models at a Community Hospital. *Journal of Clinical Outcomes Management*. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <https://www.mdedge.com/jcomjournal/article/146081/practice-management/comparison-conventional-and-expanded-physician>

<sup>8</sup> American Academy of PAs. (2014). *Attitudes Toward Physician Assistants: A 2014 Survey by the American Academy of PAs*. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <https://www.aapa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/AAPA-HarrisSurvey-Methodology-and-Tables.pdf>

