

Physician Assistant

What do Physician Assistants (PAs) do?

PAs are medical professionals who work with physicians, surgeons and other health care professionals. They can diagnose, prescribe medication and treatment, order and interpret diagnostic tests and can work in all areas of medicine. State laws dictate the scope of practice and supervision required by a physician. PAs work in hospitals, outpatient clinics, under private practice physicians, educational settings and government.

How do I become a PA?

Approximately 2,000 hours of exposure and direct patient care is required for admission to most graduate PA programs. Master's degree programs are the standard. Approximately two years of combined academic and clinical work is required from an accredited program.

What are the pre-requisite courses for entering a PA program?

A year of anatomy/physiology, biology, chemistry and at least a couple terms of physics (all with labs) are typically required; at least one course in microbiology, general psychology and statistics. Check schools carefully if you have AP/IB credit in any of the pre-req courses – schools vary in accepting these credits (OHSU does accept AP/IB). Sciences should be within seven years of application.

Do I need any experience in the field?

It is imperative that for any professional field you want to enter you understand the work and the day-to-day flow of the profession. Many PA programs require “direct patient care,” meaning the applicant is not shadowing or observing, but providing hands-on care. Obtaining a CNA, EMT or paramedic certification, or training for a phlebotomy license are some ways for potential applicants to get this experience.

How competitive are PA programs to get into?

Using OHSU's statistics from the entering class of 2015, there were 1,470 applicants and 42 selected – 223 of these were OR residents. The average age was 28, and the average GPA was 3.51.

Do I need the GRE (Graduate Records Examination)?

The majority of programs require the GRE – only a handful of programs do not. Some schools will accept the MCAT in lieu of the GRE, some will not. OHSU does not.

How much does it cost to attend a DPT educational program?

Programs vary. OHSU's tuition only (not including books, fees and other incidental costs) runs about \$85,000 for the full nine quarters.

What is an average salary of a licensed

Annual average salary ranges between \$90,000-100,000.

What is the projected job outlook for PT's?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a much faster than average rate of employment for PAs, estimating ~ 30% growth between now and 2024. The growth in the aging population, along with an increase in the number of individuals who will have access to health insurance will drive this increase. Since PAs can provide many of the same services as MDs & DOs, it is expected that PAs will play a larger role in providing basic health care.

Where can I get more information?

The professional organization, the American Academy of Physician Assistants (aapa.org) has some information. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov/ooh) and individuals schools offering PA programs are your best resources.