Physician Assistant FAQ

What do Physician Assistants (PA’s) do?
PA’s are medical professionals who work with physicians, surgeons and other healthcare 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. PA’s work in hospitals, out-patient clinics, under private practice physicians, educational settings and government.

How do I become a Physician Assistant?
Typical minimums of between 1,000- 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 & at least a couple terms of physics (all with labs) are typically required; at least one course in microbiology w/ lab, 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 professional. Most 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 a phlebotomy license are some ways for potential applicants to get this experience. Some programs accept work as a scribe while others do not. OHSU requires 2,000 hours completed at time of application.

How competitive are PA programs to get into?
Using OHSU’s statistics from the entering class of 2019, there were 1694 applicants and 42 selected – 27 of these were OR residents. The average age was 28.8, average GPA was 3.42, and the average Science GPA was 3.41. Average HC experience was 3 years of full time work.

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. Some schools are adopting the new PA-CAT.

How much does it cost to attend a PA educational program?
Programs will vary. OHSU’s tuition only (not including books, fees and other incidental costs) runs about $90,000 for the full 9 quarters.

What is an average salary of a licensed Physician Assistant?
Annual median pay estimated at 108,610.00 or $52.22 p/hr.
What is the projected job outlook for PA’s?
Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a much faster than average rate of employment for PA’s, estimating ~31% growth between now and 2028. The growth in the aging population, along with a projected shortage of MD/DO’s is driving the steady demand for PA’s. Since PA’s can provide many of the same services as MD’s & DO’s, it is expected that PA’s 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 (www.aapa.org/) has some information, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov/ooh) and individual schools offering PA programs are your best resources.