

What is a Physician Assistant?

A physician assistant (PA) is a health professional licensed by the state or credentialed by a federal employer to practice medicine as delegated by and with the supervision of a physician. PA's provide a broad range of medical and surgical services that traditionally have been performed by physicians. As part of their responsibilities, PA's perform physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret lab tests, suture lacerations, and (in most states, including Texas) prescribe medications.

Physician assistants are trained in medicine, just like physicians, and in some programs PA's attend many of the same classes as medical students. Some of the major differences in a physician's education and a PA's education are the amount of time spent in their formal education and that PA's are not required to undertake an internship or residency.

A PA-C is a "physician assistant-certified". This person holds the title by passing the certification exam developed jointly by the National Board of Medical Examiners and the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. To maintain the certified status, a PA-C must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and take the national recertification exam every six years.