

# GUIDE FOR NEW PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EMPLOYERS

## DECIDING TO HIRE

One of the most valuable attributes of the physician assistant (PA) profession is the flexibility in role and function of the PA within the dynamic model of the physician-PA team. PAs can provide versatile medical care in all settings and specialties because of their broad general medical education. Hiring a PA means gaining an extra set of skilled hands, eyes, and ears. PAs offer an array of benefits to practices and physicians, including higher revenues, improvements in patient satisfaction via accessible care, and more flexibility in the schedules of their employers.

Knowing what your practice or institution needs is the first step in making the most of the physician-PA team. Where would your practice most benefit from this assistance? A thorough analysis of your current practice needs and your patient population is time well spent and will help you find the physician assistant who will be the perfect fit.

## PREPARING TO HIRE

### *Create a Job Description*

Begin by developing a detailed job description that reflects the needs of your practice. Be sure to involve the physicians(s) who will be supervising the PA(s) and consider the supervisory style and specialties of your practice or institution. Do you seek a new graduate or a practiced veteran? Newly graduated physician assistants usually require close mentoring for the first few months of their employment; this is generally not the case with more experienced PAs.

The job description should address the following issues: Will the PA see all patients, just follow-up patients, or all first-time patients? Will they establish their own patient panel? Would you like the PA to make hospital rounds? Assist in surgery? Take call?

### *Read Your State PA Practice Act*

Well in advance of hiring, familiarize yourself with your state PA practice act — especially its provisions concerning supervision, prescribing, and delegation. A summary of PA regulations and contact information for all state medical boards is available at [www.aapa.org/gandp/gov-issues.html#laws](http://www.aapa.org/gandp/gov-issues.html#laws). In addition, AAPA staff is ready to assist you with specific questions.

### *Develop an Employment Package*

The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) can assist your practice as you devise a PA employment package. Visit the Academy's Web site for national data on PA salaries and benefits: [www.aapa.org/research/index.html](http://www.aapa.org/research/index.html).

Contracts are an essential element of the employment package. Contract negotiation lays the foundation for a fair and mutually beneficial professional relationship. The AAPA Web site features guidelines for creating contracts. Visit [www.aapa.org/gandp/pro-issues.html#employ](http://www.aapa.org/gandp/pro-issues.html#employ).

### *Understand PA Credentialing and Privileging*

Perform a thorough credentials check on the candidate. One excellent way to verify credentials is through the AMA Physician Profile Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/amaprofiles](http://www.ama-assn.org/amaprofiles). It provides all the necessary information on a PA's education; graduation; national certification status; current and historical state licensure information; and legal name, address, and date of birth. This information meets the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) primary source requirements.



**American Academy of Physician Assistants**

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*During the hiring process, request the following from the PA:*

- A copy of his or her current state license (with license #, DEA # if applicable, and expiration dates)
- A copy of current certification from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). PAs will get a certificate each time they recertify. This will have the NCCPA #, issue date, and expiration date.
- Letters of reference from previous employers and colleagues — particularly peer recommendations and physician evaluations regarding the performance of specific responsibilities (i.e., surgical skills or other special skills)
- Documentation of CME records or additional training the PA has received, e.g., current ACLS, BLS, PALS, or other certificates
- A copy of any recent hospital privileges. If the PA has a log documenting specific procedures, request a copy.

Inquire of the local hospital(s) about their policies regarding PA practice. Have PAs worked in the hospital before? Have they been privileged? If so, what are the procedures for privileging? How long will it take? Are there any physician co-signature requirements? Are competency measures used for any procedures the physician may want to delegate to the PA? What are the admission policies of the hospital? What are the policies on initial consultation in the hospital? Knowing the institution's policies on PA utilization in advance will save time and prevent surprises and frustration.

## **BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PHYSICIAN-PA TEAM**

Once the PA is on board, the PA and supervising physician(s) together should create a delegation agreement that flexibly defines the clinical partnership, taking into account the state laws and regulations. This is an opportunity to think through the ways in which you will work as a team. The physician and PA should discuss this document at least once a year and revise it as needed. AAPA's Professional Affairs staff can help with a template delegation agreement. Contact Jennifer Anne Hohman for more information at 703/836-2272, ext. 3220; [jhohman@aapa.org](mailto:jhohman@aapa.org). Communication is the key to successful physician-PA teams; AAPA features guidance and resource materials to maximize it.

### *Educate Staff and Patients*

The front office staff sets the tone for patient perception of providers. It is important that they understand that the PA is your medical partner. Educate staff to present the option of seeing a PA as a positive one. For example, they could explain that PAs allow for quicker appointments and that PA care is closely coordinated with the physicians. We suggest visiting the AAPA Web site at [www.aapa.org/geninfo1.html](http://www.aapa.org/geninfo1.html) for some information that is perfect for educating all members of the practice or institution, from front office staff to fellow physicians, about the education, qualifications, and unique role of PAs.

Having the physician personally introduce the PA to each patient at the first encounter is an effective way to build patient trust. Consider sending a letter to patients introducing the new PA, explaining the PA's background, and generally describing how the physician and PA will practice together. In addition, printed information about PAs should be available in the office for patients to read and take with them. AAPA produces brochures about PAs designed for waiting rooms. To order them, visit AAPA's on-line store at [www.aapa.org/aapastore](http://www.aapa.org/aapastore). Here you will also find AAPA's publication *Hiring a PA*, which features sample letters of introduction for use with patients and advertisement ideas for use in local newspapers.

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**Having a PA on board is an asset to your practice.**  
*Promote your new PA as the benefit to patients and fellow providers that he or she is!*