

CAREER GUIDE FOR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

SOC Code: 29-1071

Pay Band(s): 5 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Provide healthcare services typically performed by a physician, under the supervision of a physician. Conduct complete physicals, provide treatment, and counsel patients. May, in some cases, prescribe medication. Must graduate from an accredited educational program for physician assistants.

Physician Assistant positions in the Commonwealth are assigned to the following Roles in the [Nursing/Physician Assistant Career Group](#):

[Physician Assistant](#)

While Physician Assistants within the Commonwealth are all located within the Nursing/Physician Assistant Career Group, individuals may want to pursue other opportunities within the Commonwealth depending upon individual training, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests.

Other Career Group(s) that may be of interest are:

[Health Care Compliance](#)

[Physician Services](#)

[Program Administration](#)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND TASKS

(Technical and Functional Expertise)

Skills

Note: *The technical and functional skills listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physician Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the skills listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

1. Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
2. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
3. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
4. Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems.
5. Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
6. Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
7. Actively looking for ways to help people.
8. Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
9. Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.
10. Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making.

Knowledge

Note: *The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physician Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the knowledge listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

The Knowledge of:

1. Information and techniques needed to diagnose and treat human injuries, diseases, and deformities. This includes symptoms, treatment alternatives, drug properties and interactions, and preventive health-care measures.
2. Plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
3. Chemical composition, structure, and properties of substances and of the chemical processes and transformations that they undergo. This includes uses of chemicals and their interactions, danger signs, production techniques, and disposal methods.
4. Principles, methods, and procedures for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of physical and mental dysfunctions, and for career counseling and guidance.
5. Human behavior and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioral and affective disorders.
6. Structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

Abilities

Note: *The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Physician Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the abilities listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

The Ability to:

1. Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.
2. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
3. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
4. Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
5. Arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations).
6. See details at close range (within a few feet of the observer).
7. Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
8. Combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions (includes finding a relationship among seemingly unrelated events).
9. Speak clearly so others can understand you.
10. Keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.

Tasks

Note: The following is a list of sample tasks typically performed by Physician Assistants. Employees in this occupation will not necessarily perform all of the tasks listed.

1. Administer or order diagnostic tests, such as x-ray, electrocardiogram, and laboratory tests.
2. Examine patients to obtain information about their physical condition.
3. Instruct and counsel patients about prescribed therapeutic regimens, normal growth and development, family planning, emotional problems of daily living, and health maintenance.
4. Interpret diagnostic test results for deviations from normal.
5. Make tentative diagnoses and decisions about management and treatment of patients.
6. Obtain, compile and record patient medical data, including health history, progress notes and results of physical examination.
7. Perform therapeutic procedures, such as injections, immunizations, suturing and wound care, and infection management.
8. Prescribe therapy or medication with physician approval.
9. Provide physicians with assistance during surgery or complicated medical procedures.
10. Visit and observe patients on hospital rounds or house calls, updating charts, ordering therapy, and reporting back to physician.

INTERESTED?

Like people, occupations have traits or characteristics. These characteristics give important clues about the nature of the work and work environment, and give you an opportunity to match your own personal interests to a specific occupation. When you choose a job in an occupation that matches your own interests you have taken an important step in planning a successful and rewarding career.

The Physician Assistant occupation has **Investigative, Social, Artistic, and Realistic** characteristics as described below:

Investigative — Investigative occupations frequently involve working with ideas, and require an extensive amount of thinking. These occupations can involve searching for facts and figuring out problems mentally.

Social — Social occupations frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others.

Artistic — Artistic occupations frequently involve working with forms, designs and patterns. They often require self-expression and the work can be done without following a clear set of rules.

Realistic — Realistic occupations frequently involve work activities that include practical, hands-on problems and solutions. They often deal with plants, animals, and real-world materials like wood, tools, and machinery. Many of the occupations require working outside, and do not involve a lot of paperwork or working closely with others.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

It is nationally recognized that physician assistant services is a health field career and is regulated to ensure competent delivery of health care services to citizens. Therefore professional standards and competencies including certification are expected.

All States and the District of Columbia have legislation governing the qualifications or practice of physician assistants. All jurisdictions require physician assistants to pass the Physician Assistants National Certifying Examination, administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) and open to graduates of accredited PA education programs. Only those successfully completing the examination may use the credential "Physician Assistant-Certified."

The Virginia Board of Medicine provides requirements for licensure and continuing competency for this occupation. Licensing information for Physician Assistants can be found on the Department of Health Professions' web site at <http://www.dhp.state.virginia.us/>.

For eligibility requirements and a description of the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination, contact: National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, Inc.: <http://www.nccpa.net/>

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Department of Labor provides the following information:

Physician assistants (PAs) provide healthcare services under the supervision of physicians. PAs are formally trained to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and preventive healthcare services, as delegated by a physician.

The duties of physician assistants are determined by the supervising physician and by State law. Aspiring PAs should investigate the laws and regulations in the States in which they wish to practice.

All States require that new PAs complete an accredited, formal education program. Admission requirements vary, but many programs require 2 years of college and some work experience in the healthcare field. Students should take courses in biology, English, chemistry, mathematics, psychology, and the social sciences. Most applicants to PA programs hold a bachelor's or master's degree.

PA programs usually last at least 2 years and are full time. Most programs are in schools of allied health, academic health centers, medical schools, or 4-year colleges; a few are in community colleges, the military, or hospitals. Many accredited PA programs have clinical teaching affiliations with medical schools.

In order to remain certified, PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every 2 years. Every 6 years, they must pass a recertification examination or complete an alternative program combining learning experiences and a take-home examination.

Some PAs pursue additional education in a specialty such as surgery, neonatology, or emergency medicine. PA postgraduate residency training programs are available in areas such

as internal medicine, rural primary care, emergency medicine, surgery, pediatrics, neonatology, and occupational medicine. Candidates must be graduates of an accredited program and be certified by the NCCPA.

The Virginia Area Health Education Centers Programs' website <http://www.ahec.vcu.edu/hcmanual.htm> lists four Virginia Educational Institutions that offer educational programs for those interested in a career as a physician assistant. They are College of Health Sciences, Eastern Virginia Medical School, James Madison University, and Shenandoah University.

COMMONWEALTH COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a set of identified behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly and positively impact the success of employees and the organization. Competencies can be observed and measured. When consistently demonstrated, competencies make employees particularly effective in their work. Competencies help lay out a road map to career success. You can use the Commonwealth Competencies to help improve your individual performance by adopting behaviors that make high performing employees successful in their jobs. In this way, you can use the Commonwealth Competencies for your further professional development.

The Commonwealth Competencies are:

1. Technical and Functional Expertise
2. Understanding the Business
3. Achieving Results
4. Serving the Customer
5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
7. Leadership and Personal Effectiveness

The above competencies may be applied to employees throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be rank-ordered by agencies and hiring managers to represent the needs of a specific job. The rank ordering will change depending upon the occupation, an organization's priorities, the actual job requirements, and the supervisor's preferences.

Career success is both about what you do (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with others. Hopefully, by studying the Commonwealth competencies, identifying your developmental opportunities, and working to refine your own competence, you can take charge of your career!

For additional information about the **Commonwealth Competencies** go to: http://jobs.state.va.us/cc_planningctr.htm. For the competencies, we first list the competencies and then define each. Finally, we list competency indicators; to describe what successful performance looks like.

COMMONWEALTH CAREER PATH

Career opportunities in the Commonwealth are not limited to moving "up" to the next highest role and pay band, changing positions, or to becoming a supervisor. That's because most roles

describe a broad group of occupationally related positions that perform a range of work that requires increased knowledge and skills. For that reason, Commonwealth roles describe the career paths within the same or higher-level role for the same or different Career Group. The broad salary range and the Commonwealth’s pay practices provide flexibility in recognizing career development and advancement. ([Salary Structure](#))

For example: **Physician Assistant**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
5	Physician Assistant

Sample Career Path

[Physician Assistant](#)

The Physician Assistant role provides career tracks for physician assistants. This career track is for physician assistants performing entry to advanced responsibilities that require training and license as a physician assistant.

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

O*NET (Occupational Information Network)

http://online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page

Virginia Employment Commission

<http://www.alex.vec.state.va.us/>

Career One Stop

<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Virginia Career Resource Network <http://www.vacrn.net/>

Professional Organizations

American Academy of Physician Assistants

<http://www.aapa.org/>

Virginia Academy of Physician Assistants

<http://www.vapa.org/>