
Career Assignment Essay: A Certified Physician's Assistant

Abstract

The overall goal for this paper was to outline the track to becoming a certified physician's assistant in today's medical world for an aspiring student. By definition, a physician's assistant is a trained professional that practices medicine under an agreement of a licensed physician. To achieve this profession, a four year bachelors of science degree is required with an additional two year graduate program that involves advanced classes focused on patient care and science as well as a year of clinical rotations. The passing of the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination is also required for practice as well as an agreement of collaboration between a performing physician. Put together, to become a physician's assistant requires around five to seven years of school with mandatory high grade point averages in intense courses, and a large amount of time placed into clinical observation and practice. Consequently, this career goal has a high paying salary, high job security, and is overall a beneficial part of the health sciences workforce.

Career Essay

The job of a PA, otherwise known as a physician's assistant, is described as "a medical professional that practices medicine under the supervision of a physician" (American Academy of PA's, 2019). In today's medical world, a physician's assistant has all of the same responsibilities as a regular physician would. They are able to diagnose and treat illness, give physical examinations, prescribe medication and many more tasks. The only difference is that a PA has to perform these tasks under an agreement with a physician stating that they are capable of doing so correctly. Since the demand for these professionals are high, the workplaces for a physician's assistant is anywhere and everywhere. A job for this career can range from areas such as hospitals to medical offices to even nursing homes. In South Jersey, some of these settings for employment could possibly be Rothman Institute, AtlantiCare, Urgent Care, and Shore Memorial Hospital. Due to being high in need and requiring at least six years of school, Physicians assistants have a salary range of around \$66,590 that could go up to more than \$146,260. This wage will vary from state to state. For example, "in New Jersey, the average salary of a physician's assistant is around \$119,400 but in Michigan, the average in a metropolitan area is \$125,400. Showing an even more drastic difference, the average salary in Montana is \$97,920" (United States Department of Labor, 2019). This fluctuation in wages generally depends on population size which is then directly related to an increase of demand. In today's society, a PA is a highly sought after position and is an integral part of today's health care job pool, but they require large amounts of mandatory schooling.

To become a physician's assistant, it all starts with a bachelor's degree. While there isn't a specific undergraduate degree required for PA, it must be science based, focusing on subjects like chemistry or anatomy, because this career revolves around human related disciplines. One university that has this option is Stockton University (SU), which offers a degree in Health Sciences. To be considered at Stockton, admissions requires the completion of Common Application, a universal college application, along with an additional essay and two to three

letters of recommendation. SU also allows for the submission of an applicant's SAT and ACT scores for them to take into consideration, but these standardized tests are not required, they only have the possibility of increasing a student's chance to get in. When admitted into Stockton University, to be considered to be on the track to becoming a physician's assistant, a student must take a variety of courses. In chemistry, the courses required are 2110/15 CHEM 1 w/LAB, and 2120/15 Organic CHEM w/LAB. In biology, a student must take 1200/05 Cells & Molecules w/LAB, 1400/05 Biodiversity & Evolution w/LAB, 2180 Human Anatomy w/LAB, 2150 Principles of Physiology w/LAB, and 3020 Microbiology for Life Science. In the health science field, the courses are 1101 Intro to Health Science, 1241 Medical Terminology, 2305 Statistics for Health Professionals, 2501 Teamwork and Collaboration, 2301 Cultural Diversity in Healthcare, 3411 Writing & Editing for Health Science, 2411 Informatics, 1100 Intro to Psychology, and 3200 Research are necessary. All students also need to complete one general studies course that has one of the required attributes, these are "A" for Arts, "V" for Values/Ethics, "H" for Historical Consciousness, and "I" for International/Multicultural. In addition, each student must complete at least four W1/W2 courses and at least two Q1/Q2 courses. Throughout the curriculum there are also additional GIS classes and At Some Distance (ASD) classes that must be taken. The respective courses listed are classes that the student is able to choose based off of their own interests and no one specific class is necessary. For a physician's assistant, schooling does not end here. After a Bachelor of Health Science degree is achieved a master's degree is mandatory to be able to practice as a PA, and one nearby school that offers a program for this graduate degree is Jefferson University in Pennsylvania. In order to be able to apply to this program, a student must have received a minimum of a B grade or better in Cells and Molecules 1 w/LAB, Chem 1 w/LAB, Anatomy and Physiology w/LAB, Microbiology w/LAB, Statistics, and Psychology. In addition, it is required for applicants to have an unrounded average GPA of 3.25, but it is important to note that the school states online that a 3.4 or higher GPA is what they consider to be competitive. Lastly, a student applying must have at least 200 hours of direct patient care, an essay submitted through the Central Application Services for Physician's Assistant (CASPA), and three letters of recommendation. This master's program at Jefferson has a twenty seven month long duration where the first fifteen months are spent in didactic courses that are divided into four semesters. The first, pre-fall, has the classes Advanced Human Anatomy, Patient Communication, Intro to Professional Practice, Legal & Ethical Aspects of Medicine, and Evidence Based Medicine & Population Health. In the fall semester, the courses are Physical Diagnosis, Clinical Medicine I, Clinical Skills I, Pharmacology & Clinical Therapeutics I, Physiology & Pathology I, and Behavioral Science. Next, spring semester consists of Clinical Medicine II, Clinical Skills II, Pharmacology & Clinical Therapeutics II, Physiology & Pathophysiology II, and Introduction to Healthcare Quality & Safety. Finally, to finish out the classwork portion of this program, the summer semester classes are Clinical Skills III, Pharmacology & Clinical Therapeutics III, Physiology & Pathophysiology III, Health Promotion & Disease Prevention, and Special Topics in Medicine. The last part of this course is a twelve month long clinical rotation that is comprised of eight rotations, each in a different specialty that has no specific order. If a student manages to maintain a 3.0 GPA and completed all rotations properly, graduation and official licensure can be obtained. All of these academic courses can be completed in between five to seven years, depending on the person and their situation. One other factor to consider is the cost of attending these universities. At Stockton, if a student is apart of residential life, tuition is around \$26,000 a year, including a meal plan and the ability to take up to twenty credits a semester. At Jefferson, the cost of tuition and other expenses required in order to practice, for example textbooks, and medical equipment, is around \$51,720 per year. While the academic portion of these degrees may be a lot in perspective, a physician's assistant is a valued title that makes

this amount of dedication necessary for completion. While it might not be easy, it is definitely possible.

For the professional program at Thomas Jefferson University, in center city campus, the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) is a corporation that has given the accreditation. For this graduate degree, accreditation is required for the program in order to allow students who have graduated from this program to practice as a physician's assistant. After obtaining this certification, a student has to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) and with success, a legal classification of "Physician Assistant - Certified" can be used. Finally, in order to practice, a PA must have an agreement of collaboration between themselves and a physician. Although, after graduation, recertification is required every couple of years to be able to continue to practice as a PA, "it is required that at least 100 hours of "continuing education" are completed every two years and recertification from the PANCE examination every ten" (American Academy of PA's). If practice was to occur in New Jersey, a bachelor's degree, master's degree, passing of the PANCE exam, and an agreement with a physician is required. This is the same across the board for all states but some variation occurs due to the fact that some states require additional credentials to be able to practice. For example, to obtain a license in New York, a PA also has to complete infection control training and recertify this training every 4 years.

In order to make sure I am properly prepared for this future, dedication is one of the most important things. Nothing will be accomplished grades-wise if the proper amount of effort and time is not applied. The main part of the requirements for this degree stems from maintaining a high grade point average and this can be met if I focus on school and do the best I can. In addition to this, it is important to include experience and proper observation hours which can be done through practices around me. Some known that are being looked into by myself currently for hours this summer are Atlanticare and Urgentcare, where I can volunteer and observe a physician's assistant since I am not qualified to assist in any way currently. As a plan for my college career, I plan to take 1101 Intro to Health Science, 1200/05 Cells & Molecules w/LAB, 2110/15 CHEM 1 w/LAB, and a Freshman Seminar in my first fall semester. In my first spring semester, I will take 2120/15 Organic CHEM w/LAB, 1400/05 Biodiversity & Evolution w/LAB, a W1 Course, and 1241 Medical Terminology. The fall semester for my sophomore year of college will consist of 2305 Statistics for Health Professionals, 2180 Human Anatomy w/LAB, a

General Education Course with "A" Attribute and 1100 Intro to Psychology. My second year of spring semester will contain 2501 Teamwork and Collaboration, 2150 Principles of Physiology w/LAB, an At Some Distance Class, and 2301 Cultural Diversity in Healthcare. In my final year, my fall semester will be the classes 3411 Writing & Editing for Health Science, an At Some Distance Class, a GIS Class, and 2411 Informatics. During my final semester, I will take 3020 Microbiology for Life Science, a General Education Course with "G" Attribute, a General Education Course with "H" Attribute, and 3200 Research. This plan is set to allow myself to finish a Bachelor degree in Health Science in three years before moving on to the graduate program at Jefferson University.

When met with this assignment, my initial reaction was confusion. At the time, it was not clear to me why this excessive amount of thought should be put into exploring our end goal in the workplace. The key word being end. I was positive that I knew what I wanted to do and I believed that it was enough. To me, it seemed that we were so far away from starting that chapter of our lives that it made no sense to why this essay was assigned. But this all changed

when I began to read into what is required to be a physician's assistant. While I knew that this career was going to take large amounts of dedication and hard work, I didn't fully know where and what I was going to be doing while I put the effort in. After writing this essay, my overall goal for myself didn't change, but I had a lot of realization of what the expectations were going to be academically and practically. The course load and time that must be put into becoming a PA is long, rigorous, and honestly more than what I expected. But, while somewhat daunting, seeing what these programs were going to ask of me has given me an extra push to improve myself now, to help myself later. Overall, I am truly grateful for this assignment. It has opened my eyes to what my future is going to entail where before, I had been going in blind, with just the end goal, Z, in my vision. Now, instead of only currently being at A and seeing Z down the line, I can see all of the other steps that lie in between, starting with B, C, and D. While becoming a physician's assistant isn't going to be easy work, completing this assignment has helped me brace for what is going to come, and allowed me to prepare for how I will come out on top.