

# Physician's guide to hiring a Physician Assistant (PA)

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## What is a Physician Assistant (PA)?

A well trained healthcare practitioner who can take medical history, conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, assist in surgery and develop treatment plans.<sup>1</sup> One valuable attribute of the PA is their flexible role and function within the dynamic physician-PA team.<sup>2</sup>

## How does the Physician/PA healthcare team work?

The PA profession was founded on the concept of team practice which is based on AMA and AAFP guidelines.<sup>2</sup> Physician-PA teams enhance coordination and quality of care.

## How are PAs trained?

PAs are trained using the medical school model and frequently will train side by side with physicians. They complete around 2000 hours of supervised clinical practice prior to graduation. They develop similar medical reasoning skills. PAs think like doctors.<sup>2,3</sup>

## How will PAs fit into my practice?

PAs work in physician-directed teams collaborating as needed with physicians to provide high-quality patient care. They can work in almost all specialties and even remote sites.<sup>2,3</sup>

## Can PAs prescribe controlled substances?

In Washington State, PAs *can prescribe Schedule II-V drugs* and must have their own DEA number.<sup>4</sup>

## What documents can the PA sign?

A PA may sign and attest to any certificates, cards, forms, or other required documentation that the PA's supervising physician or physician group may sign.<sup>5</sup>

## Do I have liability/responsibility for the PA?

"The supervising physician and physician assistant shall retain professional and personal responsibility for any act which constitutes the practice of medicine as defined in RCW 18.71.011 when performed by the physician assistant."<sup>6</sup> It is the responsibility of the certified PA and the sponsoring physician to ensure that appropriate consultation and review of work are provided as per the delegation agreement.<sup>5</sup>

## Do I have to supervise the PA?

PAs practice medicine "only under the supervision and control of a physician." *which does not mean that the physician must be present in the room*, but may be available via telecommunication. Details of the practice arrangement between the PA and their supervising physician be on file with the Medical Quality Assurance Commission or Board of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery.<sup>2</sup> It is the responsibility of the certified PA and the sponsoring physician to ensure that appropriate consultation and review of work are provided.<sup>5</sup>

## Do charts need my co-signature?

Washington law *does not require* that PA's notes or other clinical documents be co-signed by a physician.<sup>2</sup> Individual organizations may have different requirements.

## Where can I find additional information/resources?

The Washington State Medical Association ([www.WSMA.org](http://www.WSMA.org)) *Regulatory Issues: Physician Assistants* provides detailed and broad resources to begin your process.

## How easy it is to hire a PA?

The Washington Academy of Physician Assistants (WAPA) has a job board for posting of PA opportunities. Contact WAPA on the internet at [www.WAPA.com](http://www.WAPA.com) for more help.

### References:

1. Physician Practice, October 6, 2014 [www.physicianpractice.com](http://www.physicianpractice.com)
2. Washington State Medical Association. Regulatory Issues: Physician Assistants. [www.WSMA.org](http://www.WSMA.org)
3. AAPA Professional Issues, The Physician-PA Team, March 2014
4. Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 246-854-030 "
5. Washington Administrative (WAC) 246-918-140 "Certified physician assistants"
6. Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 18.71A.050 "Physician 's liability"

