

Physician Assistants In Otolaryngology

Benefits for Employers

Hiring a PA brings several related benefits to employers and patients. Because the physician-PA team reduces appointment waiting time, patients can be seen quickly — a large boost to patient satisfaction. PA patient education and communication skills improve outcomes and free physicians to attend to more complicated cases.

The health care system, institutions, and individual practices can realize considerable savings when PAs are fully utilized. According to the Medical Group Management Association, PAs generate revenues covering far more than what their compensation costs employers. MGMA collects data annually comparing PA compensation with their gross charges.

According to the data from 2004, for every dollar of charges a PA generates for a primary care practice, the employer pays on average 24 cents to employ the PA. For PAs in surgical practices, the employer pays 31 cents for every dollar of charges generated. (*Physician Compensation and Production Survey, 2005 Report Based on 2004 Data. Reprinted with permission from the Medical Group Management Association*).

PAs in otolaryngology are a diverse and highly skilled group who practice in varied settings, including general otolaryngology and head and neck surgery. A recent survey of PAs in otolaryngology found that at least half of them performed, among other procedures, mastoid cavity cleaning, nasal cautery, foreign body removals, anterior nasal packing, pre-op history and physical, excision/biopsy of lesions, fiberoptic laryngoscopy, and nasal endoscopy including post-op debridements.

PAs practice medicine with physician supervision and have the authority to diagnose and treat patients with a range of medical conditions. Their generalist medical education provides a solid foundation from which to address the diverse aspects of ENT/otolaryngology practice, including performing physical exams, diagnosing conditions and developing treatment plans, providing health counseling, prescribing medications, and assisting in surgery.

Physician assistants attend intensive medical education programs accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant. The average PA program curriculum is 26 months and is characterized by a rigorous, competency-based curriculum with both didactic and clinical components. Programs are offered at medical schools, colleges and universities, and teaching hospitals.

All states, the District of Columbia, and the majority of U.S. territories regulate PAs. In those jurisdictions and in federal agencies, physicians may delegate to PAs those duties that are within the physician's scope of practice and the PA's training and experience and are allowed by law. After graduation, PAs are required to pass the national certifying examination administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants before they can obtain a license to practice. To maintain certification PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and take a recertification examination every six years.



Colorado Springs Practice Hires First PA

The seven physician partners in the largest ENT practice in southern Colorado recently hired their first PA. Her previous experience in surgical pediatric ENT has helped her integrate quickly into the flow of the busy practice.

The PA's key clinical responsibilities are in the clinic's otolaryngic allergy department, where more than 50 percent of the clinic's surgical patients receive treatment for related allergic conditions. Her work at the allergy treatment center allows the practice to treat patients in a timely and well-coordinated manner. The practice and patients benefit from her presence as a readily available point of contact, information, and care throughout the treatment process.

One of the PA's primary responsibilities is allergy testing on patients age 12 to adult. She discusses test results with the patients' primary ENT physicians as part of the treatment plan formulation and educates patients about the results and treatment options. After preparing the treatment vials, she discusses possible adverse reactions with patients and acts as the designated emergency contact for any negative allergic reactions that occur.

The PA also facilitates a bi-monthly meeting with all seven ENT physicians in which they discuss complex cases, coordinate patient care, and address issues of the large team practice. She also participates in the important research conducted by practice members, including one physician's fellowship involving sublingual immunotherapy. As part of her responsibilities, she tracks patients participating in the study. The physicians she works for have expressed their confidence in her abilities by sending her as the practice representative to ENT conferences, where she learns about the latest ENT techniques and technologies and shares them with the physicians upon her return.

Facilitating ENT Care for Families and Employer

A PA in a busy solo-physician, general ENT practice in New Hampshire sees an average of 25 patients a day, treating a variety of ENT conditions, including ear and sinus infections. Removal of foreign objects from young patient's ears and noses has become something of a specialty for this 26-year veteran PA. Patients are often referred to her from other practices for her expertise in this procedure. Working with her supervising physician, she provides comprehensive post-surgical care for patients, such as those recovering from tonsil or sinus surgery or correction of deviated septum, and performs endoscopic sinus debridements. To help free up time for her supervising physician, this PA makes the majority of post-operative rounds and takes call. She also makes time to teach PA students both in the classroom and in the office setting.

Young patients and their families appreciate the personalized medical care she provides. Her supervising physician appreciates the billable clinical time she frees up for him; she conducts more than 2,000 post-operative visits herself per year. As practice revenues increase, her employer reports having extra time for complex cases and his family.

A Veteran Practitioner at Mayo Clinic

One PA, a 1972 PA program graduate, has been employed by the Mayo Clinic in ENT practice for more than 30 years. This PA sees patients with a wide range of ENT conditions, including sinusitis, Meniere's disease, hearing loss, and vocal cord lesions. He screens patients for carcinomas of the larynx and treats ear infections with related conditions. He often can expedite patient visits, pleasing old and new patients with prompt appointments.

This PA enjoys a close and collegial clinical relationship with his supervising physicians and with medical residents rotating through the department. Reflecting the importance of research and academic medicine at Mayo, he balances his clinical

responsibilities with an assistant professorship at Mayo Medical School and the local PA program. He lectures to residents, medical students, and PA students and has published articles on ENT topics in the *Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants* and other clinical journals.

PA Educator-Clinician in ENT

The department of otolaryngology at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) recently hired its first PA, who has quickly become an indispensable part of the medical team.

With supervision from the department chair and other department physicians, the PA evaluates new and return patients, performs initial and follow-up exams, and develops treatment plans. She orders and assesses diagnostic studies, assesses preoperative and postoperative patients, and sees “drop in” patients with acute problems.

Her responsibilities include surgical procedures, such as thyroidectomies, glossectomies, and parotidectomies. She also performs skin and oral cavity biopsies, harvests and places skin grafts, places feeding tubes, removes impacted earwax, and provides wound care, including drain removal.

With particular expertise in cancer care from years of work at MD Anderson Cancer Center with renowned surgeon Helmuth Goepfert, once a week she sees patients in the UTMB head and neck cancer clinic.

In the inpatient setting, the PA provides surgical and post-surgical care in the department of head and neck surgery and coordinates follow-up care with radiologists, oncologists, plastic surgeons, dental oncologists, and speech therapists. By making hospital rounds and coordinating the admission and discharge of patients, she helps everyone in the circle of ENT treatment — patient, family, physician, and hospital staff — stay in touch and fully informed.

This PA also has an academic role with the UTMB PA program, where she teaches clinical medicine courses, trains visiting medical and PA students in ENT examination procedures, presents ENT-related lectures for first- and second-year PA courses, and helps coordinate ENT rotations.

Conclusion

PAs make vital and varied contributions to the well-being of patients and quality of life of their employers. For more information on the roles and activities of PAs in ENT/otolaryngology, contact the Society of Physician Assistants in Otorhinolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery, 950 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1552; 703/836-2272; fax, 703/684-1924; www.entpa.org, spao@aapa.org; or Jennifer Anne Hohman with the American Academy of Physician Assistants at 703/836-2272, ext. 3220; jhohman@aapa.org.

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The following publications are available from the AAPA store.
Order on-line at www.aapa.org/aapastore, or call 703/787-8044.

Hiring a Physician Assistant

This publication includes information about education requirements for physician assistants, guidelines regarding their scope of responsibilities and practice, and a pre-employment checklist. The book also covers topics such as state regulations, national certification, malpractice coverage, employment agreements, recruiting, and compensation. (68 pages)

Members \$25.00 Nonmembers \$50.00

Physician Assistant Third-Party Coverage

This resource summarizes third-party coverage policies for PA medical and surgical services, and outlines rules, regulations, and billing concepts for coverage of physician services provided by PAs under Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE/CHAMPUS, and private insurance companies. Practice issues such as strategies for handling claim denials are also covered. This book provides the physician assistant with insight into courses of action that can be taken to help solve problems and maintain a more positive reimbursement environment. (140 pages)

Members \$25.00 Nonmembers \$50.00

Physician Assistants and Hospital Practice

This publication is a summary of information on the practice of PAs in hospitals. It contains policy statements from national organizations, information about JCAHO, patient restraints, EMTALA, model hospital bylaws, and a sample credentialing form. (74 pages)

Members \$25.00 Nonmembers \$50.00

Contacts & Contracts: An Employment Guide for PAs

This comprehensive manual helps both new graduates and experienced PAs identify and secure the perfect job. It includes information about job opportunities, employment recruiters, resume and cover-letter writing, the interview process, and contract negotiation. Handy checklists for pre-employment issues, contract negotiations, and resigning procedures are also featured. (108 pages)

Members \$25.00 Nonmembers \$50.00

Physician Assistants: State Laws and Regulations

This publication is a detailed resource of state laws and regulations related to the PA profession, including a state-by-state summary of statutes and regulations, with information on scope of practice, prescribing and dispensing, qualifications for practice, and the definition of supervision. It contains summaries of more than two dozen key provisions of each state's statute and regulations complete with legal citations. (10th ed., 316 pages)

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