

Physician Associate Internship Fact Sheet

What is a Physician Associate?

Physician associates are collaborative healthcare professionals with a generalist medical training, who work alongside doctors, GPs and surgeons providing medical care as an integral part of the multidisciplinary team. Physician associates are medical associate professionals practitioners working with a dedicated supervisor but can work independently with appropriate support.

What do physician associates do?

- Take medical histories from patients
- Carry out physical examinations
- See patients with undifferentiated diagnoses
- See patients with long-term chronic conditions
- Formulate differential diagnoses and management plans
- Perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures
- Develop and deliver appropriate treatment and management plans
- Request and interpret diagnostic studies
- Provide health promotion and disease prevention advice for patients.
- Currently, physician associates are not able to:
 - Prescribe
 - Request ionising radiation (eg chest X-ray or CT scan).

How do Physician Associates fit into the NHS workforce?

Although physician associates are medical associate practitioners, they can also practice independently and make independent decisions sometimes under the review of the supervising GP. This is enabled by collaboration and supportive working relationships with their clinical supervisors, meaning that there is always someone who can discuss cases, give advice, and review patients if necessary.

How can they help physicians/the system?

Physician Associates increase the numbers of the medical workforce and increase access to quality care for patients. They act in an enabling role, helping to reduce the

July 21

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healthcare team's workload. They bring new talent to the NHS and add to the skill mix within the teams. While trainee doctors and surgeons rotate through different specialties, physician associates offer continuity of care for patients, as well as institutional memory for the team in which they work. Physician associate support also provides cover so that trainee doctors and surgeons can attend training, clinic, or theatre.

What training and qualifications do Physician Associates have?

Physician Associate students already have an undergraduate degree in a life science and/or a significant background in healthcare. To become a Physician Associate, students take a 2-year, full-time, intensive postgraduate course in medical science and clinical reasoning; this consists of 50% theory and 50% practice. It includes over 1,400 hours of clinical placement experience in both acute and community settings, starting at an early point of the course. This training is based on the Competence and curriculum framework for the physician associate (Department of Health 2006, revised 2012). The UK and Ireland Universities Board for Physician Associate Education links together all the universities in the UK that provide physician associate courses. It provides a network for setting standards for education and delivery of the physician associate curriculum and for sharing best practice. PAs are required to complete a national exam at the end of their degree, which if they fail means they cannot go on to practice. They have three attempts at completing the exam before having to sit the course again.

Once qualified, Physician Associates must:

- Maintain 50 hours of CPD each year
- Sit a recertification examination every 6 years.

Do Physician Associates specialise?

While physician associates can work in specialties and subspecialties, and may become very established in a specific specialty, they need to maintain general medical knowledge and to demonstrate this by passing a recertification exam every 6 years.

Internships

The internship programme was already in place before the national HEE roll out of the preceptorship programme, many of the internships in place were over Primary and Secondary Care with some sitting in services such as Mental Health and Urgent Care. Internships are generally developed as rotational programmes.

Programme overview

The internship programme is aimed at newly qualified PA's (within 12 months of qualifying) providing experience in both a Primary Care and Secondary care/Mental Health setting, which they rotate between each week. In addition to the training and support provided in the joint roles, an internship offers an opportunity to attend weekly

July 21

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half day educational settings, to complete a bespoke primary care syllabus. This is normally delivered by a tutor, usually face to face but now due to COVID is delivered online. The aim of the internship programme is to provide PAs with high quality training and support for their first 12 months after University, which can be very daunting and overwhelming when going straight into clinical settings.

The internship model which was initiated in Staffordshire and was ran by the North Staffordshire GP federation, was a success and achieved a significantly high retention rate after completion. This model has also been introduced in BSOL and Shropshire.

Source: North Staffordshire Programme Team

Process

For a GP practice to recruit an internship they must have at least good on their latest CQC inspection, have experience in training clinicians and demonstrate their induction programme. The GP practice must also have a doctor who is prepared to supervise and be the named supervisor on the FPA managed voluntary register.

The current funding package for internships is made up of 2 and a half days paid by HEE and 2 and a half days by the practice.

Discussions are happening with other local leads and the national team to establish a Foundation/Internship programme for newly qualified PA's to do a 12-month programme. This will be like the internship programme we provide but instead of local arrangements will be nationally led.

Support

For further enquiries around internships please contact:
midlands.traininghubs@hee.nhs.uk