

Physician Associate Preceptorship 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 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.

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.

Preceptorships

The preceptorship programme provides support for new graduates who have completed their PGDip or MA in PA studies and the national written exam, entering the workforce and enhances confidence and competence, providing a bridge between the supervision of the pre-registration learner and the mature clinician. The preceptorship programme was introduced nationally across HEE in 2018, as part of a national funding model for PAs. The concept of the preceptorship was to align funding across HEE as each region was doing things differently.

Programme overview

The preceptorship is a one-year programme that can commence at any point of the year, the programme provides a newly qualified PA (within 12 months of qualifying) experience in Primary Care. The programme was designed after a recognition that PA's are seldom ready for the cradle to grave nature of Primary Care; to accomplish this there is a need for more exposure to Primary Care coupled with support, mentoring and a structured learning programme. To support the programme a £5000 preceptorship allowance can be applied for by the practice which should be used to create a suitable programme for the PA during the 12 months. The application criteria can be found [here](#), this is currently in draft format as it is being developed further by the national team.

Our HEE mandate is to support an increase of PAs going into primary care, the £5000 allowance for the practice is an incentive to recruit, as it is a relatively new role (only about 400 in GP).

Process

Any practice can apply for a preceptorship if they employ a PA and agree to the criteria. This can be done at any point in the financial year, to receive funding for the current year applications need to be received by March 31st. Information that can be sent out to hosts who enquire can be found [here](#) and applications for practices can be found [here](#). Funding has been agreed and will continue for the preceptorship programme for 2021/22.

Targets are established yearly for PAs into Primary Care, the target for 21/22 across the Midlands is 56, this is a total of 48 in the West Midlands and 8 in the East Midlands. However work is ongoing with the East Midlands to promote the role of PA to increase this target in future years.

Physician Associates and ARRS

The ARRS entitles PCNs to access funding to support recruitment across different roles, one being PAs. The ARRS is an NHSE scheme and is about recruitment targets and the salary costs for these roles. All roles included in the ARRS are 100% funded. While the 26,000 can essentially be made up of any professions, we have been provided indicative numbers for some roles just as a guide - for PAs nationally this is 3500.

The PCN provided indicative numbers to NHSE at the end of October about roles they intend recruit as part of the ARRS. The table below shows these figures across the Midlands. Internships are not included in the ARRS.

STP	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Grand Total
Birmingham & Solihull	27	2	7	3	38
Black Country & West Birmingham	33	23	27	26	109
Coventry & Warwickshire	28	1	2	5	36
Herefordshire & Worcestershire	23	8	16	26	71
Lincolnshire	6	2	1	4	13
LLR	31	17	12	14	73
Northamptonshire	2	2	4	4	12
Nottinghamshire	16	2	2	13	33
Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin	3	6	4	5	18
Staffordshire & Stoke	24	15	13	16	68
Derbyshire	4	5	5	10	23
Grand Total	196	81	91	125	493

Source: HEE BI Team (Andrew See)

Physician Associate Ambassadors

The PA Ambassador (PAA) Programme is run by Health Education England. With the exponential growth of the PA profession, there needs to be advocates for the role to ensure that PAs are considered an integral part of the workforce transformation model. The role of the PAAs is mostly concerned with workforce engagement, forming links with universities and facilitation of local preceptorship and PA workforce development. PAA liaise with employers in primary and secondary care to help integrate the role into local teams. They also work with universities to facilitate PA student placements. They also support the PAs working within their

region. All PAAs work clinically alongside their ambassador duties.

Across the Midlands we have a number of PAA – please contact: midlandsprimarycareschool@hee.nhs.uk for further information.

Additional Information

HEE held a webinar which focused on PAs, the webinar took place on the 27th January to provide information to Training Hubs/PCNs around the role of the PA in Primary Care. The purpose of the webinar was to actively promote the role and benefit of a PA, particularly as they are now included in ARRS as many Practices/PCN's do not understand. A recording of the webinar can be found here: [PA Webinar 27th Jan 2021](#)

HEE have designed a leaflet which promotes the preceptorship programme and is available for you to share across your networks: [preceptorship leaflet](#)
For more information on the preceptorship programme in Primary Care please email: midlandsprimarycareschool@hee.nhs.uk

Alongside the preceptorship programme HEE are now in the process of finding an education provider to run a PA apprenticeship programme. The apprenticeship standards have been approved and further information about the apprenticeship can be found here: [Apprenticeship PA](#) the goal is to have the first cohort of PA apprentices from September 2021 – if you would like further information about the apprenticeship please contact: Liz.Sahu@hee.nhs.uk

Links to further information

Please visit:

The [HEE website](#) for information on physicians associates for employers

The [Physician associates](#) website for information for potential physicians associates

The [NHS Employers guide to physicians associates](#)