# FAQs

Introduction to the Physician Associate Role

The Physician Associate (PA) complements the wider multidisciplinary team, working alongside doctors, nurses and paramedics as well as a wide array of other healthcare professionals. Although a reasonably new role to Cornwall, the profession has a near fifteen year history around the country.

What qualifications are needed for Physician Associates?

All Physician Associate Studies programs are delivered at postgraduate level, full time over two years (a minimum of 90 weeks, approximately 3,200 hours spread evenly through theoretical teaching and clinical practice), with a prerequisite of a Science or healthcare undergraduate degree. PAs are trained to the medical model, enabling them to take a medical history, perform examinations and investigations, consider differential diagnoses and formulate a management plan. After successful completion of the PA Studies course it is essential that they pass the National Examination phase to ensure continuity of knowledge and skills nationally. The National Exam has two parts, 200 Single Best Answers (SBAs) and 14 Observed Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) stations. Currently, Physician Associates have to recertify every six years by completing 200 SBAs across most medical disciplines – this may change with upcoming regulation.

What career development opportunities are there for PAs?

Being a new profession allows the PA to forge their own path within their chosen practice. Over time they will advance on their knowledge and skills which they can evidence through a CPD portfolio. It is a requirement that PAs complete 50 hours of CPDs a year, logging these through the RCP Diary. As their competencies and capabilities grow they will start to see more complex patients, take on more responsibility, run specialist clinics (for example Paediatrics or minor ops) and have the ability to become a partner in a practice.

Are Physician Associates Regulated?

PAs are unregulated healthcare professionals, though the RCP Faculty of Physician Associates hold a voluntary register of PAs and it is recommended that employers only recruit those who are registered. As PAs are currently unregulated they can neither order ionising investigations nor are they prescribers. This is set to change with regulation coming by the end of 2021 by the General Medical Council (GMC). It is important to note that this should not be seen as a hindrance to practice, as processes to streamline prescription signing can be implemented.

What can a PA do in practice?

Physician Associates are taught in line with the medical model, allowing a PA to take a thorough medical history from patients presenting acutely or a focused history from a chronically ill patient. They are able to perform physical examinations and request or perform diagnostic studies with the objective of formulating a differential diagnosis and management plan. Other skills include:

* Triaging acutely ill patients
* Seeing urgent on the day cases or scheduled appointments
* Managing acute and chronic presentations
* Completing annual reviews
* Carrying out home visits
* Assisting in admin tasks
* Reporting on investigation / diagnostic results and following up patients
* Providing health promotion
* Referring patients to other services
* Performing procedures and minor surgery with the relevant training
* Mentoring students
* Taking part in quality improvement projects

Is there any funding for Physician Associates?

As of April 2020 the PA role will be reimbursed at 100% of actual salary through the Primary Care Network. Typical salary for a PA is in line with AfC band 7.

Why should I employ a PA?

PAs have a postgraduate qualification that is centred on teaching to the medical model enabling them to ease the workload and increase the mix of skills within your practice. They are very well suited to primary care as they have a broad general medical knowledge which they have to maintain through CPD requirements and revalidation. PAs can give extra flexibility and capacity and as their appointments are longer than average GP consultations, this could lead to greater patient satisfaction.

What support is needed for newly qualified PA or one taking up a new post?

Like all new professionals PAs need time to build their skills and competencies in a supportive learning environment. Therefore they will need close mentoring by a dedicated GP to start with which will reduce over time. PAs are dependent practitioners and will need a dedicated clinical supervisor, nevertheless they able to work autonomously with that dedicated support.

For more information please contact or click on the link below.

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Royal College of Physicians Faculty of Physician Associate:

* <https://www.fparcp.co.uk/employers/pas-in-general-practice>
* <https://www.fparcp.co.uk/employers/guidance>