Physician Assistants Working in General Practice

"Through the Foundation the RCGP has recognised the contribution other professions can bring to primary care."

Neil F. Erickson, Physician Assistant

Physician assistants provide support to GPs by taking medical histories; performing examinations; diagnosing illnesses and analysing test results amongst other responsibilities. While reasonably new to the UK, PAs have worked with the College to shape the Foundation and the package of support for members. Thanks go to several physician assistants, student PAs, the University of Birmingham and the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

We have produced this document as a brief guide to the profession, which provides information on the following areas:

1. **About the profession**
2. **Physician assistant profiles**
3. **Training opportunities**
4. **Useful links**

We hope the information below assists those wanting to know more about what being a PA in general practice involves or looking for advice and resources related to the profession.

### About the profession

Physician assistants have to meet a nationally approved standard of training and practice. This is a requirement of the competence and curriculum framework for physician assistants.

#### Registration

The Physician Assistant Managed Voluntary Register has gone live! If you are a UK-based qualified PA, you can register [here](#). By registering, you will receive some public and professional protection and will aid the move towards statutory regulation.

Registration is not yet statutory however national moves towards this are underway. The College is supportive of this move and has contributed to the consultation process.

#### Competence Framework

The [Competence Framework for the Physician Assistant](#) is available from the Department of Health.

### Physician Assistant Profiles

**Kerry Ann Warmington**

*My day starts at around 6.30 in the morning, in a whirlwind of organising the school uniform, breakfast, football kit and out the door by a prompt eight o’clock (well… ish!).*

*I arrive at surgery at 9.30, having spent the past hour and a half tackling the school run, to a waiting room jammed full of expectant faces belonging to people who have queued up patiently for their emergency place in the morning walk-in*
surgery.

I see patients every 10 minutes, up until lunch time. All ailments walk through my door, some minor, some head scratchers and some requiring a second opinion. Occasionally the surgery can be an exciting place and I may have to call an ambulance, with eager eyes in the waiting room peering round the corner to get a glimpse of the drama every time my consultation door opens.

After an hour long lunch break, which feels like only five minutes as it often entails catching up on paperwork, referrals, discussing any unusual cases and investigation results, I restart my afternoon surgery at a slower pace. These are pre booked appointments. I enjoy the relaxed approach to the afternoon, and the patients quite often have booked in specifically to see me. Once patients have been to see me to discuss their diverse, often multiple medical conditions, they come back as they like the continuity of care, and this provides a great opportunity to build up rapport with the patient. As it happens I know all about the undergraduate education of Mrs Jones grandchildren, all 8 of them!

Afternoon surgery comes to a close around five o’clock. I head back into the very inconvenient, not so free flowing, traffic of the city centre, to attempt to collect my son from school on time. At times, I have visions that when I arrive he’d have been turfed out, with school gates locked, waiting in the car park with all his school bags and football kit piled high. As it happens I manage to arrive by the skin of my teeth, where I am greeted with a big smile, and he’s waving a huge painted picture of Mommy making someone feel better with her stethoscope!

Hand in hand, we trundle back to the car. What a great finish to a wonderful day!

Lori Williams

I have been working as a Physician Assistant as part of a multidisciplinary team in the GP led health Centre in Peckham since August 2009. Situated in the heart of Peckham we serve a diverse population, with a high proportion of young and immigrant population and a high deprivation index. Often patients using the walk-in service are not registered with a regular GP. The centre is open 8am to 8pm, 365 days of the year. The centre offers a walk in service and has its own practice list.

The majority of my time is spent in clinic where, under the supervision of a named GP, I assess, diagnosis and manage patients. I see a mixture of walk in and regular patients, with a range of minor to major presenting conditions. I work eight hour shifts, with two sessions per day, seeing an average of twelve patients per session. As a walk in centre, the patient numbers vary daily therefore within the team I respond to need, seeing more patients as required. I am also allocated time for personal and practice administrative tasks, including QoF workload and have dedicated time for CPD. I enjoy the Physician Assistant role and am finding my work challenging and interesting. As one of the early qualified Physician Assistants in the UK, I have experienced first hand how the role is evolving. I am excited about the ongoing development of the Physician Assistant role in the UK and look forward to the future.

Contribution to the practice

The Mac Attack!

In the middle of the Swine Flu pandemonium this past year, the PAs at Wootton Vale Healthy Living Centre near Bedford started what amounted to a curb side consultation service. Patients concerned about having the flu bug were invited to drive over to the surgery where they would be met at their car at one end of the building to be assessed by the PA. If they were judged to be suffering from the Swine Flu, they would drive to the other end of the building where they would receive their certificate for Tamiflu and be on their way.

If it was determined that they had something other than the Swine Flu, the PA would go back in and generate the required prescription for treatment, and the patient would drive to the other end of the building to pick up the script. This whole process was extremely efficient, and was well received by the
patients. It worked especially well for the families with small children, with little or no disruption to the regular business of the surgery.

Training Opportunities

Training for physician assistants is currently being developed by a small number of higher education institutions (HEIs), including the University of Hertfordshire, Birmingham University, Wolverhampton University and St George's Medical School at the University of London. Warwick and Coventry Universities may offer training in the future.

Search for a course taking place near you

Useful links

If you’d like to recommend any further links please email us at gpf@rcgp.org.uk

RCGP General Practice Foundation
British Journal of General Practice
DirectGov
Education for Health
http://www.firstpracticemanagement.co.uk/
Leadership Qualities
Londonwide LMCs
NHS Employers
NHS Institute for Innovation & Improvements
UK Association of Physician Assistants