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Testimony: regarding the alignment of education that prepares students for the current workforce. How do you plan classes, curriculum, student life activities, and training set ups to make sure students are really prepared for what they need to know for the workforce?

BRIEFING: THE DEFINITION OF THE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

What is a physician assistant?

A physician assistant (PA) is a medical professional who works as part of a team with a doctor. A PA is a graduate of an accredited PA educational program who is nationally certified and state-licensed to practice medicine with the supervision of a physician.

What can PAs do?

PAs perform physical examinations, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret lab tests, perform procedures, assist in surgery, provide patient education and counseling and make rounds in hospitals and nursing homes. All 50 states and the District of Columbia allow PAs to practice and prescribe medications.

How are PAs educated and trained?

The PA educational program is modeled on the medical school curriculum, a combination of classroom and clinical instruction. The PA course of study is rigorous and intense. The average length of a PA education program is 27 months.

Admission to PA school is highly competitive. Applicants to PA programs must complete at least two years of college courses in basic science and behavioral science as prerequisites to PA school, analogous to premedical studies required of medical students. The majority of PA programs have the following prerequisites: chemistry, physiology, anatomy, microbiology and biology. Additionally, most PA programs require or prefer that applicants have prior healthcare experience.

PA education includes instruction in core sciences: anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, physical diagnosis, pathophysiology, microbiology, clinical laboratory science, behavioral science and medical ethics.

PAs also complete more than 2,000 hours of clinical rotations, with an emphasis on primary care in ambulatory clinics, physician offices and acute or long-term care facilities. Rotations include family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, general surgery, emergency medicine and psychiatry.

Practicing PAs participate in lifelong learning. In order to maintain national certification, a PA must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years.

There are currently 181 accredited PA programs in the United States. The vast majority award master's degrees. PA education programs are represented by the Physician Assistant Education Association and accredited through the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

How do doctors and PAs work together? If there's a PA in my practice group, can I request to be seen by the PA?

By design, physicians and PAs work together as a team, and all PAs practice medicine with physician supervision. Supervision does not mean, though, that a supervising physician must always be present with the PA or direct every aspect of PA-provided care.

PAs are trained and educated similarly to physicians, and therefore share similar diagnostic and therapeutic reasoning. Physician-PA practice can be described as delegated autonomy.

Physicians delegate duties to PAs, and within those range of duties, PAs use autonomous decision-making for patient care. This team model is an efficient way to provide high-quality medical care. In rural areas, the PA may be the only healthcare provider on-site, collaborating with a physician elsewhere through telecommunication.

If there is a PA in your group practice, you can certainly request to be seen by him or her. PAs deliver high-quality care, and research shows that patients are just as satisfied with PA-provided care as they are with physician care.

Source : http://www.aapa.org/the_pa_profession/what_is_a_pa.aspx

1. Alignment of education that prepares students for the current workforce.

As described in the briefing physician assistants must possess high-level critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to interact in a team environment. Therefore the educational experience must provide instructional methods that align with these professional requirements. In appendix A the curriculum outline for the MSPAS program is provided for your information.

The program lines instructional preparation with professional requirements in the following manner: Hybrid pedagogical methods that include combination of lecture, cooperative case-based learning, clinical vignettes using simulated patients, laboratory experiences to apply clinical skills, and assessment methods that measure the type of instructional experience. The student's cognitive knowledge base is measured by written examinations that prepare the students for the national certifying examination. The students received multiple practical examinations to ensure that they have developed appropriate competency in all aspects of the physical examination and clinical procedures. Affiliation with the Commonwealth medical

school enables the PA students to receive training in the male and female examination and a comprehensive medical school based clinical exam. In the clinical year the students complete approximately 2000 hours of clinical experiences distributed across required clinical settings and disciplines. They are required to develop competencies based upon the program's graduate competencies which are evaluated by preceptors. The students are also required to complete discipline-based examinations and present case studies upon completion of each clerkship. To prepare the students for the graduate certifying examination they complete a series of formative and summative examinations that simulate the actual experience.

2. How do you plan classes and curriculum?

The curriculum is aligned using several overarching standards and competencies. The curriculum must meet the requirements for an accredited program by ARC-PA . The curriculum must expose the student to more than 478 disease topics covered on their national certifying examination. The program design is based upon 17 overarching program goals (appendix B). Individual classes are mapped to these overarching goals. Each class is required to have course goals, course competencies and instructional objectives. The clinical rotations are required to have the same structure. The curriculum is continued and assessed through interactive advanced assessment process that ensures the students are achieving the required competencies.

3. Student life activities:

The program requires the students to engage in service learning and become a member of the student Academy of the American Academy of Physician Assistants (SAAAPA) . All students in the clinical year attend the national conference to experience the national governance process and interact with members of their chosen profession. Each class elects officers for the Student Academy that participates in national governance activities. Students are encouraged to run for national office to encourage activism and involvement in legislative activities. The program aspires to graduate students who are competent clinicians but also are engaged in improvement of their own profession and community.

4. Training set ups to make sure students are really prepared for what they need to know for the workforce.

The program engages in an integrated assessment process that ensures the students are achieving the necessary goals and competencies for entry into the profession. These domains include intellectual/cognitive skills that are measured continuously until graduation to measure students preparedness for the national certifying examination. Psychomotor domains are measured through simulated patient encounters in the didactic year and through preceptor assessments in the clinical year. The students must pass a comprehensive clinical examination at Commonwealth Medical School which ensures that they possess the appropriate psychomotor, students and interpersonal skills for entry into the profession. Upon graduation the students complete a self-assessment instrument which is based upon program goals and competencies as a framework. This provides feedback for the program to improve components within the curriculum that are perceived to be in need of improvement by the students. This

continuous assessment loop ensures the program continuously upgrades the curriculum to meet the demands of the practitioners of today and the future.

APPENDIX A

Curriculum

Delivered in on-campus laboratories as well as off-campus supervised clinical settings, the MSPAS curriculum is coordinated with relevant practice to provide students an integrated learning experience. The first (or didactic) year is comprised of basic medical and clinical sciences. The second (or clinical) year includes nine five-week clinical clerkships in a variety of professional settings and geographic locations, to ensure that students amass a wide range of learning experiences.

CURRICULUM TOTAL: 101 SEMESTER HOURS

Curriculum Outline - Year I

Fall Semester

Introduction to the Profession
Clinical Medicine I
Patient Assessment
Gross Clinical Anatomy
Pharmacology I
Physiology / Pathophysiology I

Total 17 credits

Spring Semester

Health Care Issues I
Clinical Medicine II
Patient Assessment II
Pharmacology II
Physiology / Pathophysiology II
Clinical Genetics

Total 18 credits

Summer Semester

Health Care Issues II
Clinical Medicine III
Pharmacology III
Emergency Medicine
Medical Procedures & Surgery
Special Populations
Research, Epidemiology and Statistics
Total 17 credits

Curriculum Outline - Year II

Professional Year II clinical rotations:

Ambulatory Medicine
Internal Medicine
Pediatrics
Psychiatry
Surgery
Women's Health
Emergency Medicine
General Elective Rotation x 2
Clinical Research Rotation

Professional Development
PANCE Preparation
Summative Evaluation
Total 49 credits

APPENDIX B

The following are program goals for graduates of the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (MSPAS) curriculum:

Goal 1: Develop the ability to perform a complete physical exam and to organize, integrate, interpret and present clinical data in a clear, concise manner.

Goal 2: Support effective and sensitive communication with patients.

Goal 3: Develop critical thinking and evaluative skills.

Goal 4: Develop effective communication and teamwork skills with health care teams.

Goal 5: Provide a comprehensive approach to normal human health and development, both physical and mental.

Goal 6: Provide an explanation and demonstration of the skills needed to assess core diseases encountered in primary care.

Goal 7: Integrate diagnostic assessment skills with knowledge of patient presentation, pharmacology and health care subspecialties to synthesize appropriate treatment plans

Goal 8: Promote cross-cultural and socioeconomic sensitivity, confront prejudice, and support the development of effective medical practice in a diverse society.

Goal 9: Promote a commitment to provide effective, accessible, continuous, comprehensive, and personalized health care.

Goal 10: Emphasize the fundamental importance of ethical behavior in medical practice.

Goal 11: Promote teaching of patients, community and colleagues.

Goal 12: Participate in the generation of new knowledge in medicine, whether through research, health policy administration, or as distinguished practitioners.

Goal 13: Develop cutting edge knowledge of the Physician Assistant profession and participate as leaders at the local, state, and national level shaping future policy and legislation to promote Physician Assistant practice.

Goal 14: Apply knowledge of study designs and statistical methods to the appraisal of clinical studies and other information on diagnostic and therapeutic effectiveness, and integrate evidence from scientific studies related to their patients' health problems.

Goal 15: Apply knowledge of basic science concepts to facilitate understanding of the medical sciences.

Goal 16: Demonstrate basic competency in basic clinical procedures performed by a graduate Physician Assistant.

Goal 17: Upon graduation, be prepared to enter the workforce as a gainfully employed Physician Assistant with excellent job search skills and the knowledge to obtain and maintain licensure in any state to practice as a Physician Assistant.

Thank you for your attention.