



PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT - SCOPE OF PRACTICE



This document defines the range of tasks that a Physician Assistant (PA) may normally be expected to perform, as defined by the Canadian Academy of Physician Assistants. The activities of the PA are at all times subject to control by relevant government legislation and regulations, by the supervising physician, and by the policies of the PA's employer.

Practice Sector

This Scope of Practice is intended to apply to the Physician Assistant practicing in health care facilities under the direction of a physician registered in a Canadian jurisdiction.

In specialized settings such as private sector employment or military service, PAs may be assigned additional tasks consistent with their training and with job requirements.

Legislative and Liability Issues

The regulation and licensing of professionals practicing in civilian health care is a provincial responsibility. The publication of this Scope of Practice does not imply the existence of the right of PAs to practice in any particular jurisdiction. Enquiries in that regard should be directed to the relevant ministry of health.

In locations where the practice of PAs is authorized, the supervising physician, the PA and the employer of the PA should address matters of professional liability prior to work taking place.

Role of the Physician Assistant relative to the Physician

The PA works under the authority of a supervising physician. Through delegation by the physician to the PA, the physician / PA team is able to afford patients increased access to primary care medical services.

The PA can be empowered to make certain decisions and to take certain actions autonomously, at the discretion of the supervising physician. At all times the PA works in consultation with the supervising physician, who retains responsibility for direction of the PA's activities and overall accountability for health care delivery. The PA is not intended to supplant the physician as the principal medical decision-maker.

Level of Supervision Required

The supervising physician must be licensed to practice medicine in the jurisdiction within which the PA functions.

Supervision may be direct or indirect, and may or may not require the presence of the physician at the point of care.

The physician and the PA are required to consult together to determine the degree of supervision necessary. This may vary from time to time, dependent upon the qualifications and experience of the PA, the nature of the practice setting and the extent of development of the professional relationship between the physician and the PA. The supervising physician shall ultimately determine the extent of supervision required.

The degree of supervision shall be laid out in writing and must include a definition of the extent to which the physician will routinely review diagnostic and treatment information, based on the patient's medical condition.

In the event that the supervising physician is not available to provide supervision to the degree required, an alternative supervising physician must be identified.

The PA is expected to remain constantly aware of his / her Scope of Practice and knowledge limitations, and to seek the supervising physician's direction whenever necessary. In all situations except life-threatening emergencies, the PA is expected to identify themselves to the patient as a PA who is functioning under the supervision of a licensed physician.

Work Settings

PAs are employed, or may be expected to be employed, in most locations where primary health care services are delivered.

In under-serviced areas PAs can play an important role in increasing access to medical services.

PAs are often employed in specialized work settings such as industry and military service, and may make important contributions in work such as disaster relief. In these situations PAs sometimes receive training in medical specialty areas.

Range of Services Permitted

The PA acts with a high level of professionalism and well-developed interpersonal skills, and utilizes comprehensive technical and medical training, to provide services in emergency care, primary care and preventive medical education.

Subject to the approval of the supervising physician, the PA undertakes a broad range of activities in the following areas:

Patient Assessment

Obtaining medical / incident history, performing focussed and comprehensive physical examinations, performing routine medical screenings.

Clinical Investigation and Diagnosis

Obtaining and interpreting routine diagnostic tests (such as CBC, chest X-ray and EKG).

Conducting basic laboratory, electrocardiographic and other diagnostic tests (usually in remote settings where specialized laboratory and other services are not available).

Treatment Plan

Determining whether the PA may provide diagnosis and treatment directly or whether a referral is required to a physician or other specialist.

Developing, or assisting the physician to develop, a treatment plan.

Implementing a monitoring program, and conducting ongoing assessments for both in-patients and out-patients.

Prescribing medications according to a designated list set by the supervising physician and / or pharmacist.

Therapeutic Intervention

Applying rapid intervention in the case of trauma management and cardiac emergencies (eg ACLS).

Performing procedures such as injections, immunizations, suturing, minor surgery, splinting and casting fractures.

Health Maintenance

Providing basic public health, mental health and patient education in areas such as hygiene and sanitation, water quality, lifestyle counselling, sexually transmitted diseases and workplace safety.

Assessing facilities relative to health and safety issues.

Conducting immunization programs.

Administration

Providing basic health care administrative functions such as case management, records management and (in isolated settings) dispensing medications.

Specific Job Skills

For information about the specific job skills of PAs, refer to the National Occupational Competency Profile for Physician Assistants prepared by the Canadian Academy of Physician Assistants.

Payment for PA Services

Mechanisms for the remuneration of PAs and physicians relative to PA service delivery are matters for determination within the specific practice jurisdiction affected, and are beyond the scope of this document.