Competencies for Graduates

In order to prepare for certification and professional practice as a Physician Assistant, the PA student must graduate from a competency based, entry level, accredited PA program. The UNC PA program consists of didactic and clinical education guided by the Standards for Physician Assistant Education, as set forth by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). Upon completion of the program the graduate should possess defined basic competencies required to deliver high quality health care in a dynamic clinical environment.

In an effort to define PA competencies the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA), the ARC-PA, the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), and the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) have developed a list of suggested clinical competencies for the PA profession. The competencies are based on the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) model with areas specific to PA practice.

With respect to the guidelines for PA competencies specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes are addressed in PA education. Students graduating from the UNC PA program must be able to demonstrate competence in the following areas:

Medical Knowledge

Physician Assistants are expected to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the structure and function of the human body from conception to death
- Demonstrate knowledge of the presentation, etiologies, risk factors, pathophysiology, and epidemiology for medical and surgical conditions, applying this knowledge to patient care
- Demonstrate knowledge of the diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of diseases encountered in specialized areas of medicine
- Correlate history and physical findings and diagnostic studies to formulate a differential diagnosis
- Identify signs and symptoms of medical conditions encountered in both the inpatient and outpatient settings
- Select, order, and interpret appropriate diagnostic and laboratory studies
- Differentiate between normal and abnormal anatomic, physiological, and diagnostic test data
- Manage acute and chronic medical and surgical conditions
- Analyze the indications, contraindications, side effects, interactions and adverse reactions of pharmacologic agents
- Identify the appropriate site of care for the patients’ medical condition
- Identify cases requiring emergency treatment and those requiring referral or hospital admission
- Apply appropriate interventions for the prevention of acute and chronic medical conditions
Interpersonal and Communication Skills

Physician Assistants are expected to:

- Create and sustain a therapeutic and ethically sound relationship with patients
- Communicate effectively with patients, families, and the public across a broad range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds
- Apply effective listening, nonverbal, explanatory, questioning, and writing skills to elicit and provide information
- Work effectively with physicians and other health care professionals as a member or leader of a health care team or other professional group
- Demonstrate an understanding of the varieties of human behavior in response to illness and death
- Demonstrate caring and respectful behaviors when interacting with patients and their families
- Accurately and adequately document information in the medical record regarding the health care process for medical, legal, quality, and financial purposes

Patient Care

Physician Assistants are expected to:

- Work effectively with physicians and other health care professionals to provide patient-centered care
- Gather essential and accurate information about their patients
- Obtain a complete medical history
- Perform a complete physical examination
- Competently perform medical, surgical, and laboratory procedures (see “technical procedures taught”) including but not limited to:
  - Basic and advanced cardiac life support
  - Wound care
  - Specimen collection
  - Administration of therapeutic agents
  - Application of aseptic technique and universal precaution
  - Surgical assisting
  - Performance of office based procedures and tests
- Make informed decisions about diagnostic and therapeutic interventions based on patient information and preferences, up-to-date scientific evidence, and clinical judgment
- Counsel patients and their families in regard to medical and psychosocial issues
- Provide patient education in health promotion and disease prevention to maximize patient autonomy
- Provide health care services aimed at preventing health problems and/or maintaining health
- Provide compassionate healthcare to patients of all age groups, genders, and ethnicities
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Physician Assistant Program

Professionalism

Physician Assistants are expected to demonstrate:

- Understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements for physician assistant practice
- Understanding of the appropriate role of the physician assistant
- Professional relationships with physician supervisors and other health care providers
- Respect, compassion, and integrity in all clinical and professional situations
- Responsiveness to the needs of patients and society
- Accountability to patients, society, and the profession
- Commitment to excellence and on-going professional development
- Commitment to ethical principles pertaining to provision or withholding of clinical care, confidentiality of patient information, informed consent, and business practices
- Sensitivity and responsiveness to patients’ culture, age, gender, and disabilities
- Self-reflection, critical curiosity, and initiative

Practice-Based Learning and Improvement

Physician Assistants are expected to:

- Analyze practice experience and perform practice-based improvement activities in concert with other members of the health care delivery team
- Locate, appraise, and integrate evidence-based scientific studies related to their patients’ health problems
- Apply knowledge of study designs and statistical methods to the appraisal of clinical studies on diagnostic and therapeutic effectiveness
- Apply information technology to manage information, access on-line medical information, maintain electronic medical records, and support continuing medical education
- Recognize that life-long learning is critical to modern medical practice
- Facilitate the learning of students and/or other health care professionals
- Recognize and appropriately address gender, cultural, cognitive, emotional and other biases; gaps in medical knowledge; and physical limitations in themselves and others

Systems-Based Practice

Physician Assistants are expected to:

- Utilize information technology to support patient care decisions and patient education
- Effectively interact with different types of medical practice and delivery systems
- Understand the coding systems necessary for practice reimbursement
- Understand the funding sources and payment systems that provide coverage for patient care
- Practice cost-effective health care and resource allocation without compromising quality of care
- Advocate for quality patient care and assist patients in dealing with system complexities
- Partner with supervising physicians, health care managers and other health care providers to assess, coordinate, and improve the delivery of health care and patient outcomes
- Accept responsibility for promoting a safe environment for patient care and recognizing and correcting systems-based factors that negatively impact patient care