

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

### **What is a physician assistant (PA)?**

A PA is a health care provider who is licensed by the Medical Quality Assurance Commission (MQAC) to practice medicine to a limited extent only under the supervision and control of a physician and who is academically and clinically prepared to provide health care services and perform diagnostic, therapeutic, preventative, and health maintenance services.<sup>1</sup> All PAs must wear identification or a badge identifying him or herself as a PA at all times when meeting or treating patients.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is the difference between a physician assistant (PA) and a certified physician assistant (PA-C)?**

A certified physician assistant (PA-C) is an individual who has successfully completed an accredited and approved physician assistant program and has passed the initial national boards examination.<sup>3</sup>

A physician assistant (PA) is an individual who either:<sup>4</sup>

- Successfully completed an accredited and approved physician assistant program, is eligible for the national boards examination, and was licensed in Washington State prior to July 1, 1999;
- Qualified based on work experience and education and was licensed prior to July 1, 1989;
- Graduated from an international medical school and was licensed prior to July 1, 1989; or,
- Holds an interim permit.

Effective July 1, 1999, an individual applying for a license as a physician assistant must have graduated from an accredited and approved physician assistant program and must be certified by successful completion of the national board examinations.<sup>5</sup> Applicants for an interim permit will have one year from issuance of the interim permit to successfully complete the examination.<sup>6</sup>

### **May physician assistants sign documents ordinarily signed by a licensed physician?**

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<sup>1</sup> RCW 18.71A.010

<sup>2</sup> WAC 246-918-130(7).

<sup>3</sup> WAC 246-918-005(1).

<sup>4</sup> WAC 246-918-005(2).

<sup>5</sup> WAC 246-918-050.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

Yes. Both a PA<sup>7</sup> and a PA-C<sup>8</sup> may sign and attest to any document that might ordinarily be signed by a physician, including (but not limited to) birth and death certificates.

### **Can military experience be used to become licensed as a PA in Washington?**

Yes. An applicant for a license as a PA who has military training or experience satisfies the training or experience requirements to become licensed as a PA unless the Medical Quality Assurance Commission determines that the military training or experience is not substantially equivalent to the standards of this state.<sup>9</sup>

### **What must a physician do to utilize a PA in the physician's practice?**

A physician who wishes to use a licensed PA must obtain approval from the MQAC.<sup>10</sup> Before commencing practice, a licensed PA must apply to the MQAC for permission to be employed or supervised by a physician or physician group. The physician or physician group and the licensed PA must jointly submit to the MQAC a practice arrangement plan which delineates the manner and extent to which the PA will practice and be supervised.<sup>11</sup> A new practice plan must be submitted if a PA who is currently credentialed desires to become associated with another physician.

A licensed PA may practice medicine only with the MQAC's approval of the practice arrangement plan and only to the extent permitted by the MQAC. A licensed PA who has not received approval of the practice arrangement plan may not practice.

### **May a PA practice in a manner inconsistent with an approved practice arrangement plan?**

No. Whenever a PA practices in a manner inconsistent with the practice arrangement plan approved by the MQAC, the MQAC may take disciplinary action.<sup>12</sup>

### **What is the supervising physician's liability for the acts and omissions of a PA?**

Both the supervising physician and the PA retain professional and personal responsibility for the acts and omissions of the PA.<sup>13</sup>

A supervising physician may be disciplined for aiding and abetting the unlicensed practice of medicine if the PA is permitted to practice medicine beyond the scope of practice approved by the MQAC.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> WAC 246-918-130(3).

<sup>8</sup> WAC 246-918-140(2).

<sup>9</sup> RCW 18.71A.023.

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<http://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/MedicalCommission/MedicalLicensing/ApplicationsandForms.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> RCW 246-918-080.

<sup>12</sup> RCW 18.71A.030.

<sup>13</sup> RCW 18.71A.050.

<sup>14</sup> RCW 18.71A.050.

### **May a PA prescribe legend drugs?**

Yes. A PA may prescribe legend drugs, when approved by the MQAC and assigned by the supervising physician, for a patient who is under the care of the supervising physician.<sup>15</sup> A certified physician assistant may prescribe legend drugs when approved by the MQAC.<sup>16</sup>

### **May a PA prescribe controlled substances?**

A PA may not prescribe controlled substances unless specifically approved by the MQAC.<sup>17</sup> A certified physician assistant may prescribe controlled substances.<sup>18</sup>

### **Whose DEA number must a PA use if approved by the MQAC to prescribe controlled substances?**

On written prescriptions for Schedule II through V controlled substances, a PA who is approved by the MQAC to prescribe controlled substances must include the PA's DEA registration number or, if none, the sponsoring physician's DEA registration number, followed by the letters "P.A." (or if the PA is a certified PA, the letters "P.A.-C"), and the PA's license number.<sup>19</sup>

### **May a PA practice in a remote location other than where the supervising physician is located?**

Yes, but only under limited circumstances and with MQAC approval.<sup>20</sup> A physician assistant who holds an interim permit may not practice in a remote location.<sup>21</sup> The MQAC may approve a PA's practice in a remote site if:<sup>22</sup>

- There is a demonstrated need for such utilization.
- Adequate provision exists for immediate communication between the supervising physician and the PA.
- The responsible sponsoring or supervising physician spends 10% of the PA's practice time in the remote site, or in the case of part-time or unique practice settings, demonstrates that adequate supervision is being maintained by an alternate method.
- The names of the sponsoring or supervising physician and the PA are prominently displayed at the entrance to the clinic or in the reception area.

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<sup>15</sup> WAC 246-918-030

<sup>16</sup> WAC 246-918-035.

<sup>17</sup> WAC 246-918-030.

<sup>18</sup> WAC 246-918-035

<sup>19</sup> WAC 246-918-030. -035.

<sup>20</sup> WAC 246-918-120(1).

<sup>21</sup> WAC 246-918-120(3).

<sup>22</sup> WAC 246-918-120(2).

**Must a physician review and countersign chart entries made by a PA?**

Chart entries made by a physician assistant must be reviewed and countersigned within two working days, unless another time period is permitted by the MQAC.<sup>23</sup> Countersignature of chart entries made by a certified physician assistant is not required.<sup>24</sup>

**What should a supervising physician do when unable to supervise due to a temporary absence?**

The supervising physician must identify a designated alternate supervisor who will take over supervisory and review responsibilities in the supervising physician's absence.<sup>25</sup>

**What are the responsibilities of a nonsupervising physician who utilizes or advises a PA?**

A nonsponsoring physician who knowingly requests a PA to render care to a patient or knowingly consults with a PA is responsible for the care provided by the PA.

**What happens if the sponsoring or supervising physician's practice is limited by disciplinary action?**

To the extent the sponsoring or supervising physician's practice has been limited by disciplinary action, the PA's practice is similarly limited while working under that physician's sponsorship or supervision.<sup>26</sup>

**Are there requirements for continuing medical education for PAs?**

Yes. Physician assistants must complete one hundred (100) hours of continuing medical education every two (2) years.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> WAC 246-918-130(4).

<sup>24</sup> WAC 246-918-140(2).

<sup>25</sup> WAC 246-918.130(6), 246-918-140(4).

<sup>26</sup> WAC 246-918-105.

<sup>27</sup> WAC 246-918-180.