



2016 Stakeholder Summit Summary

The importance of continuous quality improvement cannot be overstated given the ever-evolving health care landscape. In order for PAs to continue providing the highest-quality health care to our patients, educators and practitioners must engage in an ongoing dialogue to ensure a strong alignment between educational expectations and clinical competencies.

In March 2016, the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) hosted the **Stakeholder Summit**, bringing together PAs, PA educators, policy makers, and employers from across the country. The Summit's principal focus was to identify the key skills, knowledge, and experiences that new PA graduates need to be successful in clinical practice - and how PA education can adapt to better prepare students for the health care environment they will encounter.

In addition to PAEA, three other national PA organizations sponsored the Stakeholder Summit: the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA); the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA); and the American Academy of PAs (AAPA). This joint project with organizations from across the PA lifecycle serves as a model for how other health professions associations can collaborate to build a shared understanding of the important issues affecting their constituents.

The summit yielded many crucial insights and constructive suggestions that will help PAEA in our efforts to ensure education is aligned with the practice environment. However, additional dialogue across the PA profession will be needed to explore these ideas in greater depth and identify next steps. For this reason, we're calling the Summit the first in a series of "fortunate events" through which we can address the future of PA education.

Summit Objectives and Approach

Over the course of two days, the attendees examined a variety of issues, designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Come to a consensus around key assumptions about health care and the medical education environment that will influence the future of PA education.
2. Identify a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that PA students will need to successfully being practicing medicine on day one of their employment.



3. Explore current exemplars and future ideas about the kinds of experiences students need to be effective when they enter practice.
4. Develop guiding principles to align PA education more closely with the emerging future of PA practice.

Attendees were asked to take a perspective of someone looking back from the future – a future where PA education and practice are tightly aligned and where new graduates are able to “hit the ground running” as they enter a variety of practice settings (e.g., primary care office, hospital, specialty clinic). From this vantage point in the “successful future,” we asked attendees to tell the story of how we got from the present to their imagined future, describing the challenges they were able to overcome along the way.

The stories that attendees told grappled with the most relevant issues of contemporary PA education: creating more opportunities for PA students to get practical, high quality clinical training; adapting the PA curriculum to include interpersonal and clinical reasoning skills; helping employers understand and experience the value that PA students can contribute to their practices; and developing PA programs that promote interprofessional education experiences.

Guiding Principles

The insights gained from attendees at the Summit helped us develop a set of guiding principles that span the continuum of PA education – from the pre-acceptance process through the transition into practice.

Pre-Acceptance

1. Sharpen the professional identity of PAs and the impact of the value they contribute. Embed these concepts into PAs from the moment they are accepted into PA school.
2. Screen for both interpersonal (e.g., leadership, collaboration, professional maturity, critical thinking) and scientific and technical skills during the application process.

Academics

1. Continue PA education along the generalist model to ensure that future PAs can flexibly transition between multiple specialties – including primary care.



2. Apply PA graduate competencies to guide PA programs' efforts to refresh their curriculum and the types of clinical experiences that are available, ensuring that those competencies have been acquired.
3. Develop more opportunities throughout education and training for PAs to learn and work alongside the other health care professions comprising interprofessional health care teams.
4. Explore partnerships with other programs (e.g., business, public health) on the same campus to leverage resources that result in innovative programming.
5. Supplement the teaching of hard science and clinical skills with interpersonal skills including leadership, empathy, influence, and collaboration.
6. Regularly revisit the content of PA program curricula to meet the changing needs and expectations of potential employers, from large health systems to smaller practices.
7. Provide opportunities to strengthen the clinical reasoning skills of PA students, including clinical studies interpretation, quality improvement, and outcomes research.

Clinical Experiences

1. Build a closer connection between PA programs and their clinical partners to ensure that the learning experiences that students have meet the shared expectations of both the programs and the clinical sites.
2. Develop a portfolio of clinical sites that can provide a variety of clinical settings, including office-based, health system, and community-based environments.
3. Provide training and professional development support to clinical preceptors, helping them to fulfill their commitments and also feel valued as they make their important contribution to the future of the PA field.
4. Implement innovative approaches to expanding the number of clinical sites for PAs to meet the rapidly growing demand (e.g., national network of clinical sites).
5. Accurately and persuasively communicate the value that clinical sites create for PA education in both primary and specialty care.

Transition to Practice

1. Create a shared definition of what it means for new graduates to successfully enter practice.
2. Develop additional educational opportunities for recent PA graduates and early career PAs, including structured activities while new graduates are



- preparing for their certification exams (e.g., rotations, mini-residency or fellowship programs, orientation onboarding).
3. Encourage new PA graduates to embrace the importance of life-long learning and equip them with the skills to do so.

While these guiding principles are focused on education, PAEA will need to leverage our unique and powerful relationship with our Four Org partners to prioritize and implement these ideas. In particular, we'll need to work closely with ARC-PA to ensure that accreditation supports the educational innovations that PA programs need to adopt to keep pace with changes in practice, new models of teaching, and other opportunities that strengthen the profession's ability to educate future PAs.

Note: The views expressed in this summary as those of the Physician Assistant Education Association, and do not necessarily represent the conclusions of other attendees or sponsors of the Stakeholder Summit.