

Comparing Professions: Physician Assistant (PA) vs. Allopathic (MD) / Osteopathic (DO) Medicine

Comparison	Physician Assistant (PA)	Allopathic (MD) / Osteopathic (DO) Physician
Schooling & Debt	The average length of a PA program is 2-3 years with an average of \$100,000 of debt.	The average length of medical school is 4 years plus 3-5 years of residency with an average of \$200,000 of debt.
Job Growth & Salary	The PA profession is growing at a rate of 28% (much faster than average job growth) with a median salary of \$130,020.	The Physician & Surgeon profession is growing at a rate of 4% (as fast as average job growth) with a median salary of \$239,200.
Scope of Practice	Varies by State. Primarily Patient-Care Focused. Tasks may include: Taking medical histories, performing physical examinations, ordering and interpreting laboratory tests, diagnosing illness, developing and managing treatment plans for patients, prescribing medications, and assisting in surgery	Tasks may include: Taking medical histories, performing physical examinations, documenting and updating charts and patient information to show findings and treatments, ordering tests and consultations for other physicians or healthcare staff to perform, reviewing test results to identify abnormal findings, Recommending, designing, and implementing treatment plans, addressing concerns or answering questions that patients have about their health and well-being, helping patients take care of their health by discussing topics such as proper nutrition and hygiene, participating in applicable research projects.
Research Involvement	Less Common	Somewhat Common
Ability to Own a Practice	Varies by state. Typically requires collaboration with a physician.	Yes
Specialty Flexibility	Ability to change specialties through on-the-job training (additional formal education & training not required)	Changing specialties is possible but challenging (requires additional formal education & training)
Number of Programs in the United States	Approximately 300	Approximately 200
Program Start Term	Spring (January) or Fall (August/September)	Fall (August/September)
Academic Preparation	GRE or PA-CAT Entrance Exams are possible, many programs are test optional. Typically requires same pre-requisite courses as medical school (except Physics I & II), and also requires Anatomy & Physiology I & II and Microbiology.	MCAT Entrance Exam is required. Typically requires same pre-reqs as PA school (except Anatomy & Physiology I & II and Microbiology) and requires Physics I & II.

Citations & Additional Resources

- AAPA: [Scope of Practice](#) & PAs and [Practice Ownership](#)
- Occupational Outlook Handbook: [Physicians and Surgeons & Physician Assistants](#)
- AAMC: [How Much Does It Cost to Attend Medical School? Here's a Breakdown](#)
- The Physician Assistant Life: [How Much Does it Cost to go to Physician Assistant \(PA\) School?](#)
- PMPH Blog: [Deciding Between PA and MD](#)

Questions

If you have question, please reach out to your assigned [PreHealth Advisor](#).