



Introduction of Physician Assistants to British Columbia

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Introduction

- 22-year Veteran of Canadian
- CCFP(EM)
 - Mostly rural ERs
 - Island Health 2013-present
- Entrepreneur
 - Business provides care to remote industry

Anytime, anywhere...



Experience with PAs

- Worked with/supervised PAs in Canadian military
 - Afghanistan
 - Submarines/Ships
 - Special Operations
- Lecturer at the Canadian Forces Medical Services School

Anytime, anywhere...



Experience with PAs

- Maintenance of Clinical Readiness Program
 - Cowichan District Hospital
 - Locations throughout Ontario previously
- CMA Accreditation of McMaster PA Program

Anytime, anywhere...



Experience with PAs

- Currently employ or oversee PAs at
 - Rio Tinto Diavik Diamond Mine
 - Burgundy Diamond Mines
 - Newmont Musselwhite Gold Mine
- Provided oversight to PAs at sea 2016-2022

Anytime, anywhere...



International Experience

- United States – 168k PAs
- United Kingdom
- The Netherlands - >1k
- Australia
- New Zealand
- Germany

Anytime, anywhere...



PAs in British Columbia

- Only in Canadian Armed Forces
 - Canadian Forces Trauma Training Centre (West)
 - Vancouver General Hospital
 - Air Force Base in Comox
 - Navy Base and deployed abroad with Maritime Forces Pacific
- All previous attempts to implement unsuccessful

Anytime, anywhere...

Physician Assistants (PAs)

are highly skilled health care providers who practice medicine, and work within health care teams to improve patient health.

EVERYDAY, PAs PRIORITIZE
PATIENT EDUCATION
TO INFORM AND EMPOWER PATIENTS

PAs PERFORM
PATIENT ASSESSMENTS
HISTORY + PHYSICAL EXAM

PAs IMPROVE ACCESS +
DECREASE WAIT TIMES

ORDER + INTERPRET
TESTS
IMAGING, LABS, + MORE!

PAs FIRST-ASSIST IN
SURGERY
+ DO PRE-OP, POST-OP CARE

PAs DO
DIAGNOSE

PAs PERFORM
PROCEDURES + INTERVENTIONS

PAs CAN
PRESCRIBE
MEDICATIONS + DIFFERENT TREATMENT MODALITIES

PAs FORMULATE
TREATMENT PLANS

PAs WORK IN
DIFFERENT SPECIALTIES

Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Dermatology, NICU, Paediatrics, Cardiology, Nephrology, Psychiatry, Neurology, Orthopaedic Surgery, Physiatry, ENT, Oncology, CCU, ER, Geriatrics, Rehab, and more!



Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Training

- Three accredited PA education programs
 - McMaster (Bachelors PA Program)
 - University of Toronto (Bachelors PA Program)
 - University of Manitoba (Masters PA Program)

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Training

- New Programs
 - Dalhousie University (commenced Winter 2024)
 - University of Calgary (Summer 2024)
 - University of Saskatchewan (?2025)

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Training

- Year 1
 - Didactic
 - Clinical Skills
- Year 2
 - Clinical placements
 - Family medicine, geriatrics, surgery, EM, IM, psychiatry, pediatrics, women's health, electives

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Training

- Generalist initially
- Can specialize after under the direction of the supervising physician(s)

Anytime, anywhere...



Conference Board of Canada

- Multiple reports demonstrating efficacy and cost-effectiveness of PAs
- Many anecdotal reports that PAs extend the working lives of ERPs

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Practice in British Columbia

- Only in Emergency Departments initially
- Not a designated health profession in BC (yet - ?2025)
 - Certified non-registrant
 - No defined scope of practice
 - All work to be
 - Assigned
 - Delegated or
 - Supervised

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Practice in British Columbia

- Delegate
 - Physician can authorize all or part of a restricted activity to be performed by a PA without supervision
- Assigning
 - Non-restricted activity to be performed without delegation or authorization

Anytime, anywhere...



Current Legislation Restrictions

Except in the situation of an emergency, prior to delegating the authority for a physician assistant to perform an activity, **the delegating physician must have first assessed the patient and established a treatment plan and be satisfied that the physician assistant has the appropriate knowledge, skill and judgment to perform the delegated act.** The physician assistant must be able to carry out the act as competently and safely as the delegating physician.

Anytime, anywhere...



Health Professions Act

- Outlines what PAs can and cannot do
- Identifies supervisory requirements for specific procedures
- Appropriately cautious on introduction

Anytime, anywhere...



Supervising Physician Role

- Ultimately responsible for PA practice
- Until they are deemed a regulated health profession, no independent scope of practice
- Remuneration considerations complex

Anytime, anywhere...



Supervising Physician Role

- Clinical Lead likely to assume majority of “official oversight”
 - CPD driven by PA experience
- Must be hired by Health Authority
- Professional-technical “chain of command” through MDs
- More frequent evaluations in Year 1 (new program!)

Anytime, anywhere...



Recommendations on Optimizing PA Practice

- Although no longer trainees, mentoring and professional development will enhance the PAs practice
- Use PAs to see cases that will take you longer (e.g., 90yo weak and dizzy, large lacerations)
- Collaborative practice
- Don't expect perfection on Day 1 – we weren't perfect!!!

Anytime, anywhere...



Saanich Peninsula Hospital ER Pilot Program

- SPH
 - 18 bed ED
 - 31k patient visits per year
 - Recent overnight closures due to personnel shortfalls
 - X-ray, lab, CT, overnight hospital coverage

Anytime, anywhere...



Saanich Peninsula Hospital ER Pilot Program

- Medical leadership in Island Health with previous positive experience with PAs
- Outside the box thinking in a time of HR challenges
- Consultant identified from Island Health to assist with implementation

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Implementation Challenges

- Canada has awoken to the value of PAs
- Recruiting in a jurisdiction that didn't recognize a profession
- Cost of living

Anytime, anywhere...



Physician Assistant Implementation Challenges

- Current pay scale as determine by HEABC
- Use of term “Pilot”
- Current Bylaws significantly restrict PA practice and eliminate any efficiencies

Anytime, anywhere...



Way Forward

- Very optimistic long term
 - Beautiful province
 - Recognized that we need novel solutions to address access
 - PAs want to come “home” in many cases
 - College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC supportive
- Short term
 - Supply and pay major issues

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???QUESTIONS???

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