

Physician Assistant (PA) School: Direct Patient Contact/Clinical Work

Nearly every Physician Assistant (PA) school in the nation requires direct patient contact/clinical work. The number of hours required for successful admission varies greatly depending on the schools you choose to apply to. Keep in mind that many schools list a low or moderate number of hours required, yet mostly select students with significantly more hours than listed, sometimes even thousands of hours higher. Generally, it is recommended to secure a position working with patients as early as possible and accumulate as many hours as you can.

WHY DO PA SCHOOLS REQUIRE CLINICAL HOURS?

The PA profession was founded at Duke University using Navy Hospital Corpsmen as a solution to the physician shortage in the 1960's. Because the PA program was designed to accommodate Corpsmen with significant experience in healthcare, the program was intended to be only about two years long and without a residency. Now, decades later, the profession has a rich history of admissions based on applicants with significant work experience. While it is not impossible to be admitted to PA school without clinical experience, it is extremely difficult as significant clinical experience shaped the way PA school was originally structured.

WHAT TYPES OF EXPERIENCES & JOBS COUNT?

PA schools are looking for applicants with direct patient care, which means experience offering clinical care to patients. Simply working in a doctor's office or hospital is not sufficient, it is required to actually administer healthcare service (e.g. assisting with physical therapy exercise, helping surgery patients recover, or collecting blood samples). Usually, the higher the level of responsibility, the more PA schools will value your experience. However, it is also important to consider what opportunities are available to you, how quickly you can accumulate hours, what training is adequate, and what experiences are accepted by your schools of choice. Not all schools will accept all experiences, so it is important to consult with the schools you would like to apply to when choosing your clinical work experience.

It is difficult to offer a comprehensive list of acceptable direct patient care clinical experiences. Again, consult with the schools you are applying to before making a decision. A few jobs that are popular among BYU students include:

- Certified Nurse Assistant
- Physical Therapy Technician
- Phlebotomist
- Paramedic
- Surgical Technician
- Medical Assistant
- EMT
- Athletic Trainer
- Patient Care Technician
- Orderly
- Nurse
- EKG Technician

Generally, it is safest to choose a PAID job versus a volunteer opportunity in direct patient care; many schools will not accept unpaid hours. Usually, paid jobs offer a higher level of responsibility, which PA schools value as part of your preparation for PA school. Consult with the schools of your choice to ensure you meet their requirements.

HOW MANY HOURS DO I NEED?

It is difficult to offer an approximation of how many clinical hours you will need to be successfully admitted to PA school. The national average is approximately 2500 hours per applicant, although students may be successful with fewer hours if they carefully choose schools that fit their levels of experience.

Many BYU students are successfully able to manage full-time school and are able to accumulate adequate hours in a paid clinical job to be competitive applicants prior to graduation. Others, however, choose to graduate and continue to amass clinical experience before applying a few years later.

WHEN DO THE HOURS NEED TO BE FINISHED?

The application for PA school opens in April about a year prior to attending to PA school. Many schools will expect all clinical hours to be completed prior to the application. However, sometimes schools will choose to project forward if you are still working. This is usually limited to the time between when an applicant submits the application and when the schools evaluate the application, and not the entire year between application and matriculation.