

HOW CAN PHYSICIAN ASSOCIATES HELP GPs?

WHAT IS A PHYSICIAN ASSOCIATE?

The PGDip Physician Associate programme at the University of Reading has been developed in partnership with local NHS groups in response to the growing demand for this professional role in the NHS. The Department of Health's Competence and Curriculum Framework defines the physician associate as a healthcare professional 'who, while not a doctor, works to the medical model, with the attitudes, skills and knowledge base to deliver holistic care and treatment within the general medical and/or general practice team under defined levels of supervision.'

Physician associates (PAs) support doctors in the diagnosis and management of patients and are trained to perform a number of roles, including:

- taking medical histories
- performing examinations
- diagnosing illnesses
- analysing test results
- developing management plans
- providing patient education

PA roles in the NHS are expanding to support and work alongside doctors and other healthcare professionals with a focus on providing continuity and flexible care for patients. The physician associate role is being developed across the NHS to meet major staffing strategies.



"As a qualified GP, I have seen first-hand the ever-increasing pressures on the NHS and their impact on both the service users and the workforce. When the Physician Associate programme was born at Reading, I saw a great opportunity to have a direct influence on the programme's development and the creation of a whole new group of local healthcare professionals."

**Dr Simone Magee, Academic Director,
Physician Associate Programme**



HOW MUCH WILL HIRING A PHYSICIAN ASSOCIATE COST?

The average annual salary for a physician associate is around £35,000. Typical starting salaries are between £30,000 and £31,383 (NHS Band 7), although they may go in at Band 6 if working an internship.

HOW CAN PHYSICIAN ASSOCIATES BENEFIT YOU?

Dr Chris Morris, Joint Managing Partner at Farnham Road Practice in Slough, has employed physician associates at his Practice, and trained many Reading students as part of their placements.

Why did you decide to start working with PAs?

There is a definite recruitment and retention problem – there are just not enough GPs. When I heard about PAs, we saw it as a way to bridge the gap in the workforce. We employed one and offered to get involved in training – it only seemed reasonable we did our bit by training PAs. There is a good future for them so I wanted to help demonstrate their value to others. We now employ two PAs.

How has working with PAs benefitted you and your work?

We've learnt things from the PAs, they are fascinating and enjoyable to work with and it's great to work with different healthcare professionals within the medical model. It is a different relationship to the one I have with other GPs because we share a list of patients – it's a close working relationship, and this has enabled me to look after many more patients. They learn quickly too so it's rewarding. PAs are good at writing letters, reports, and referrals, and analysing lab results. They work well with acute and complex patients.

What would you say to a GP who is undecided about hiring a PA?

PAs require supervision and significant investment in time to train them to the standard we need. However, our investment has been well rewarded in terms of lessening the workload and providing professional satisfaction from working in a different way with colleagues.

How do you think PAs are benefitting the wider healthcare industry?

PAs are capable, with training, of doing parts of the roles of many different doctors. They could well be a vital part of the workforce in years to come. The Reading students I've worked with so far have all been keen, enthusiastic, intelligent, well-motivated and committed to the profession. They are seen as being the answer to lots of healthcare issues, especially in hospitals, and so are in high demand.

Dr Aman Bindra, GP at Kennet Surgery in Reading, is one of the University's new GP supervisors. He works with physician associate students during their placements.

I decided to start working with PAs because I enjoy teaching and saw this as a way to increase my skills while helping others learn. I was also curious about the programme and how the scheme may benefit the NHS, and primary care in the future.

To date, I have been very impressed by the physician associates' knowledge levels and the maturity that the experience brings to their learning and communication skills.

The PA course is, in my experience, producing graduates who are able to take a history and examination, as well as formulate appropriate management plans. They are also able to help with performing procedures, and these skills are valuable in all areas of the NHS.



IF YOU WOULD
LIKE TO TRAIN A PA,
OR FOR MORE
INFORMATION

@ physicianassociate@reading.ac.uk
0118 378 8574
www.reading.ac.uk/pharmacy