

## The Netherlands Physician Assistant

### Author Profile:

Geert van den Brink is program coordinator of the HAN Master physician assistant and chair of the Dutch platform PA/NP.



Quinten van den Driesschen has been a physician assistant since 2006 with clinical experience in primary and urgent care. He is a medical-lecturer at Han University of Applied Sciences, co-founder and first president of the Netherlands Association Physician Assistants (NAPA) and member of the NAPA working-group International affairs.



Lian Elfering has clinical experience as a physician assistant in plastic surgery, is a former board member of the NAPA and member of the NAPA working group on International Affairs.



### General Information:

The PA profession was introduced to the Netherlands in 2001 as a temporary pilot. In 2003, the Universities of Nijmegen and Utrecht launched the first accredited PA Master's degree programs in the country. This was followed by programs in Amsterdam, Groningen and Rotterdam. The number of programs is limited by the government and students enrollment is capped at 250 to 270 per year. Since July 1st, 2018 the title "Physician Assistant" in the Netherlands is a protected title that only PAs can use who successfully completed an accredited Master's degree in Physician Assistant.

### Entry Criteria:

Entry criteria is the same for all PA programs in the Netherlands and includes the following criteria that a student should meet: a Bachelor's degree in healthcare fields such as nursing or physiotherapy with at least 2 years of work experience, have a labor agreement with a Medical Healthcare Institute as a PA student and a tri-partite agreement with the PA program, the Ministry of health and the Medical Healthcare institute. There is no entrance examination required.

### Education:

Currently, there are 5 PA programs in the Netherlands that educate the approximately 250 students who matriculate each year (Table 1).

Table 1: Five Universities that train PAs in the Netherlands

- University of applied sciences Arnhem and Nijmegen (<https://www.han.nl/opleidingen/master/physician-assistant/duaal/>)
- University of applied sciences Utrecht (<https://www.hu.nl/deeltijd-opleidingen/master-physician-assistant---duaal/>)
- University of applied sciences Rotterdam (<https://www.hogeschoolrotterdam.nl/opleidingen/master/physician-assistant-algemeen/duaal/>)
- Hanze University of applied sciences Groningen (<https://www.hanze.nl/nld/onderwijs/gezondheid/academie-voor-gezondheidsstudies/opleidingen/master/physician-assistant/>)
- University of applied science In Holland Amsterdam (<https://www.inholland.nl/opleidingen/master-physician-assistant/>).

The structure of PA education is similar among the 5 Universities. Each University confers a Master of Science degree after a program of 30 months. The structure of the programs blends didactic and clinical education throughout the program. Students are employed by a health care institution and earn a monthly salary. They work as a student-PA for 2 days a week, participate in didactic instruction in school classes 1 day each week and then rotate in a clinical setting 2 days each week. The fee for this program is regulated by the Ministry of Education and the student or his employer has to pay approximately €5000 for the whole program. The employer of the PA student is subsidized for the salary that he pays the student (approximately €55,000). PA education follows a T-shape model: every student receives education in broad-general medical content and then additional specialty specific content is provided via differentiated instruction for students depending on where they will work after graduation.

### Financing Education:

The Dutch Government subsidizes healthcare institutes that educate PAs. In addition, education for students is fully financed by the Ministries of Health and Education.

### Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

In the Netherlands, the PA programs are accredited by the Netherlands and Vlaamsch Accreditation Organization (NVAO).

After successfully completing all requirements and graduating from a PA program, PAs in the Netherlands must register in a governmental publicly accessible database called B.I.G. (<https://www.bigregister.nl/>) for regulation and with the Netherlands Association of Physician Assistants (NAPA).

In the Netherlands, the PA profession is recognized by the Ministry of Health, medical councils and health care insurance agencies. There is a strong collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Universities and the professional organization, NAPA. This is an important reason why the PA profession is so well integrated within the healthcare system. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health work together as they subsidize the PA programs for a fixed amount of 270 students a year and also subsidize the institutes that hire PAs.

#### Professional Licensure:

To become certified as a PA, one must complete all educational requirements for graduation and an application. There is no national certification examination and every five years a renewal application must be completed with demonstration of at least 16 hours a week of clinical experience as a PA to maintain registration in the B.I.G.

#### Scope of Practice:

The PA is an autonomous medical profession working in a collaborative setting with physicians. PAs work in all medical specialties and in all medical settings. By law, PAs are competent to diagnose and treat medical conditions, order diagnostic testing, prescribe medication and other treatments, perform surgical procedures and to admit and discharge. Prescription rights contain a number of classes of medications that are utilized in the setting and medical specialty in which the PA works. Dutch law gives full independence in diagnosing, initiating treatment and performing medical procedures. The following medical tasks: catheterizations, surgical procedures, injections, punctures, prescribe medication, endoscopies, elective, electrical cardioversions and defibrillation can be executed legally and independently by a PA.

#### Maintaining Role:

To maintain registration in the NAPA Quality Registrar, PAs must demonstrate that they have earned at least 200 hours of NAPA recognized Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) every five years. Although the NAPA Quality Registration is not required by the B.I.G., all healthcare institutes require the PAs to have this registration.

#### Job Opportunities:

From an employment perspective, the future is bright for graduating PA students. Because of the structure of the education system that requires all incoming students to have an employment agreement prior to enrollment, all students are employed after graduation. Currently, there are 1,750 PAs graduated in the Netherlands. To put this in international perspective, there are roughly 10,000 general practitioner physicians and 60,000 medical specialist physicians in the Netherlands.

References:

1. Netherlands Association of Physician Assistants. Accessed March 1, 2021.  
<https://www.napa.nl/english/>
2. Driesschen, Quinten van den MPA; Roo, Frank de MPA Physician assistants in the Netherlands, Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants: September 2014 - Volume 27 - Issue 9 - p 10-11 doi: 10.1097/01.JAA.0000453240.00098.83
3. [www.zorgmasters.nl](http://www.zorgmasters.nl)