

New Zealand Physician Associates

Author Profile:

Lisa deWolfe, PA-C



Lisa joined a general practice clinic in the Far North of New Zealand in February 2019. She graduated from the Physician Assistant Program at Northeastern University in 1987. She worked in the United States (US) for 30 years in emergency medicine, family practice, and internal medicine practicing in the state of Maine. International medicine has been a passion of hers and she worked at Maine Migrant mobile clinics in the US and has worked in India, Palestine, Belize, and Honduras. She is the current president of the New Zealand Physician Associate Society (NZPAS) and works at Te Hiku Hauora General Practitioner Clinic.

General Information:

Similar to other countries, the Physician Associates (PA) profession began in New Zealand as a pilot demonstration with US trained PAs due to a projected shortage of General Practitioners in the future. In 2012, seven US trained PAs were recruited to work in primary care and rural emergency medicine. This successful pilot has led to the recruitment of additional PAs to work throughout the country. There are currently 10 PAs working in the country. The program is still in its infancy in New Zealand; however, PAs are working hard to develop the framework for expansion of the role and the creation of an educational program to create homegrown PAs.

Entry Criteria:

NZ as no PA program to date.

Education:

No PA program exists in New Zealand at this time. There are plans in progress to work with a New Zealand Medical School to develop an accredited PA program.

Financing Education:

NA

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

The plan is to create an accredited PA program alongside a NZ medical school.

PAs are currently not regulated but there is some progression towards a scope of practice and to be regulated under the Medical Council of NZ. The PA profession through the NZPAS is currently in the process and is hopeful they will achieve regulation in the next few years. Work is ongoing with the Preliminary Assessment Team at Health Workforce New Zealand - Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Health recognizes the PA profession as an unregulated practitioner under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (HPCAA).

Professional Licensure:

All PAs currently working New Zealand have been educated, trained and have clinical experience in the United States. In addition, all have been certified by the National Commission on the Certification of PAs (NCCPA) in the US.

At this time, there is no current process for licensing or certification in New Zealand.

Scope of Practice

The PA scope of practice in New Zealand is collaboratively determined by the supervising physician and PA based on the physician's scope of practice and the PAs previous clinical experience. PAs in New Zealand are primarily working in general practice and urgent care. In the US, PAs have a license to prescribe and this is the goal when PAs become a regulated profession under the Health Practitioner's Competence Assurance Act.

Maintaining Role:

To maintain a high standard of care, PAs must meet all requirements and earn 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every 2 years to maintain US NCCPA certification.

Job Opportunities:

There are currently 8 clinics and 10 PAs working in New Zealand with more clinics willing to hire. There are several PAs practicing in New Zealand and the profession has been well received by GPs, NPs, nurses, administrative staff and patients. Clinics with PAs find that the transition to include this new scope is seamless and that PAs have much to offer the workforce in New Zealand, especially when regulated.

References:

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3. Gammel, Elisabeth PA-C, MS Physician assistants in New Zealand, Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants: November 2014 - Volume 27 - Issue 11 - p 10-11. doi: 10.1097/01.JAA.0000455651.96800.6a