

### Saudi Arabia Physician Assistants

#### Author Profiles:

Dr. Naveed Ahmed is a Clinical Assistant professor and program director of The Prince Sultan Military College of Health Sciences (PSMCHS), Physician Assistant Master Program (2013 – 2016). At present, Naveed is working as the Statistics Unit Head in the Vice Deanship of Development and Quality Department at PSMCHS. He is also the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) committee's, quality coordinator at PSMCHS. He has held faculty appointments at the George Washington University, Medical Faculty Associates as an academic coordinator and Drexel Hahnemann PA Program in Philadelphia as a clinical assistant professor. His Master's in physician assistant studies was awarded from the University of Nebraska. Other responsibilities include Curriculum and Study plan unit head and Community service standard leader. Naveed maintains professional affiliations with the American Academy of Physician Assistants and Pennsylvania Academy of Physician Assistants. He has lectured at the local, state, national and international levels. Additionally, he has authored a chapter in the Physician Assistant Review, 3rd ed., and has published case studies and review articles.



Prof. David Fahringer, is an Associate Professor in the Physician Assistant Program, Department of Health Services, College of Health Sciences, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (USA). His academic background is in Religion, Biology, and Public Health. His medical interest is in Radiology,

Public Health, Geriatrics, and Integrated Medicine. His educational interest is in interdisciplinary education, service learning, national and international PA clinical education. Prof. Fahringer holds two undergraduate degrees and a Master's in Public Health. He also holds two professional degrees in radiology and the other as a Physician Assistant. He has worked clinically in GI, Occupational, Preventive and Environmental Medicine. Since 1994 he has been teaching in the Physician Assistant Program at the University of Kentucky. At the national level he has served in Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) in the following areas: the Membership Committee, PAEA graduate advisory to SAAAPA and the Chair of IAC. In 1995 introduced the PA concept to Great Britain by sending PA clinical students to England every year and going there to develop the concept twice a year until 2010. He is also one of the four founders of the International Academy for Physician Associate Education in 2007. He started the first PA program in the middle east in Saudi Arabia in 2010 with George Washington University-Medical Faculty Associates at Prince Sultan Military College of Health Sciences where he was the program director. Prof. Fahringer returned back to the University of Kentucky in Aug of 2012 and is now the Interim Chair and Program Director of the PA Studies in the Department of Physician Assistant Studies.



#### General Information:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest Arab state in the Gulf Cooperation Council and makes up 80% of the Arabian Peninsula. In pursuit of providing the most advanced healthcare available to its people, the Medical Services Division (MSD) of the Ministry of Defense & Aviation, adopted the Physician Assistant profession as an adjunct model which was initiated in 2010 through collaboration with George Washington University Medical Faculty Associates (GWU-MFA), Dept. of Emergency Medicine. The program was guided by high standards set forth by the U.S. based Accreditation Review Commission on PA Education (ARC-PA) and focused on the core competencies of Physician Assistant medical practice established by the U.S. National Commission for the Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).

#### Entry Criteria:

The entry criteria for the program are the following: Four-year degree, patient care experience, and have been selected to come into the military training which the boot camp is at the same time as the PA students' first 6 months of training. Patient care experience is recommended but not required.

#### Education:

Saudi Arabia currently has one school, the Prince Sultan Military College of Health Sciences PA Program. The education consists of 12 months of didactics and 12 months of clinical practice that are only in the hospital and clinics which totals 24 months. There is a didactic year which consists of 3 semesters and a transitional semester which strengthens a student's academic and clinical knowledge and skills. The

goal of this semester is to prepare students for the didactic phase of the curriculum and includes: Integrated Medical Sciences, English for the Healthcare Professional, The Physician Assistant Profession, Skills Building, Medical Terminology and Clinical Practice. The clinical year consists of 1800 clinical hours in: Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Surgery, Psychiatry, Emergency Medicine and Field and Combat Medicine Primary Care (elective).

During the first year of the program in 2010, there were 28 students, the second year (2011) there were 22 students that started the program, but only 18 completed the program. There were 15 graduates in 2013. There were five students in 2012 and all five graduated in 2014. There were two students in 2014 and both graduated in 2015. No cohort intake since 2016 due to the College awaiting approval from the Medical Services Division (MSD) of the Ministry of Defense & Aviation.

#### Financing Education:

Education is financed through the Military.

#### Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS), Professionals Council, and Ministry of Health (MOH) regulate the profession and Ministry of Higher Education (NCAAA – National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment) accredit the program.

Despite the PA Program's relevance and usefulness in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) military, the profession has not been recognized in the mainstream of higher education. The profession has several affiliations with various hospitals and universities.

#### Professional Licensure:

Upon successful completion of the program, graduates qualify to sit for a Comprehensive Certifying Examination for 2 days including an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), an oral examination, a written examination (350 multiple choice questions and short answers; written in the US) and procedural exam.

There is no licensing system for the profession currently nor is there a database of searchable providers.

#### Scope of Practice:

The scope of practice is based on the American model. PAs are allowed to take a history and physical, formulate a differential diagnosis, perform procedures such as arterial lines. PAs in KSA are not allowed to prescribe medications.

#### Maintaining Role:

Physician Assistants are required to have 100 Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours every two years though there is no system for monitoring this at this time.

#### Job Opportunities:

Out of the 22 PAs, only 5 are clinically practicing in the military hospital and clinics as healthcare providers, others are teaching in health-related programs and doing administrative work in the military.

References:

1. Health care system in Saudi Arabia: an overview M. Almalki,<sup>1,2</sup> G. Fitzgerald <sup>2</sup> and M. Clark <sup>2</sup>
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3. PAs around the World: Accessed February 26, 2021.  
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