

## **A Healthcare Cadre That Meets A Country's Needs**

By Mary Showstark, MPAS, PA-C

A global health care workforce crisis exists. Physician Assistant/Physician Assistant Comparable (PA/PA-comparable) professions can help fill this gap especially in areas such as obstetrics/gynecology, surgery, and infectious disease. These professions, recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) include Physician Assistants/Physician Associates (PA), Clinical Officers/Clinical Associates, and Assistant Medical Officers. They exist in more than 50 countries under numerous different names as there is no unifying, international title for this cadre.<sup>1</sup> (Table 1). The International Labour Organization (ILO) classifies these providers as Paramedical Practitioners in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) document; however, the ILO classification has brought some confusion around the name as being confused with Ambulance Workers which is a separate ISCO classification.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to these professions as PA/PA-comparable cadre. In each country, the PA/PA-comparable, like medical doctors, have variations in education, accreditation, regulation, licensing, and scope of practice. There is limited research on this group and very little written by local PA/PA-comparables themselves, thus the following articles are a medical anthropological start to gathering the PA/PA-comparable history from the perspective of this international cadre.

### **Role**

The PA/PA-comparable plays a pivotal role in task-sharing to relieve the unmet burden of disease. Task-sharing recognizes that providers should work together in an interprofessional collaborative environment ridding the hierarchal notion of what was previously described as task-shifting. Task shifting referred to health care workers with less training and qualifications performing tasks and activities that meet the country's needs. PA/PA-comparables are trained to do tasks, regardless of the length of their schooling. On average, the PA/PA-comparable can take a history, perform a physical exam, diagnose, treat, perform procedures, and in certain countries prescribe medications. In some countries they may be the sole provider of health care and perform surgeries such as caesarian sections.<sup>3</sup> Other roles for this cadre include public health, management, and education. This cadre may work independently or with limited supervision from a medical doctor. Studies have demonstrated no clinically significant differences in the outcomes of caesarean section when postoperative assessment is carried out by this cadre or the quality of care that this cadre demonstrates.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

### **Education**

The PA/PA-comparable professions have variations in their training and education and is based on the country's needs. Students may enter training programs directly from secondary schooling while others may require a pre-requisite degree such as a bachelor's degree. Other requirements may include an entrance examination and clinical hours. On average, the PA/PA-comparable is

trained for three years. Upon completion of a training program, students may receive a diploma ranging from a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree. At the current moment there is very limited reciprocity for this cadre after completion of their education. For example, if providers wish to work in the United States (U.S.), they must repeat their education in the U.S. accredited program.<sup>1</sup> Some countries do allow for reciprocity such as Burundi and Rwanda.

### Financing Education

Financing of this education may be paid for by the government or scholarship. Some students must privately fund their education. Students who are unable to pay for their education may be removed from a program, thus leading to further increases in the health care gap.

### Accreditation/Regulation

Many of the schools are accredited that teach PA/PA-comparables; however, the profession suffers from a lack of regulation. Regulation refers to set rules that must be followed, ensuring licensure qualifications and standards are properly evaluated, enforced, and applied. While accreditation is a seal of approval (from some independent accrediting body) certifying that an organization or individual has met specific standards. Lack of accreditation or regulation can cause friction amongst health care cadres due to a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities and may create the notion of "task-creeping," whereby providers feel their role is being taken over by PA/PA-comparables. It can also lead to the PA/PA-comparable being unable to obtain a job, advance in positions, and/or obtain a medical license. Many different structures are in place across countries which include governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Labour that work together to support the advancement of the profession; however, some countries lack this support.

### Professional Licensure

Professional licensing also affects the PA/PA-comparable cadre. Certain countries do not have a licensing system set up. This hinders the cadre from obtaining a job, advancing in salary, and achieving recognition. This can be very difficult for the cadre as they are working alongside other health care providers and carrying a lot of the responsibilities but without receiving the same recognition. Ultimately, it may lead to attrition thus exacerbating the existing health care crisis. Continuing professional development (CPD) is a requirement in some countries to maintain licensure. This profession does not have specific CPD providers as many CPD activities are listed only for nursing and medical doctors.

More than 30 countries are covered which include a summary of the profession in each country. The articles contain general information about the profession, entry criteria to schooling, accreditation/regulation, financing the schooling, professional licensure, scope of practice, and

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<sup>1</sup> To practice the United States, a physician assistant must graduate from an accredited training program. Accreditation is performed by Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC).

job opportunities. Several topics are not discussed at length as they are included elsewhere. A list of educational programs for the profession can be found at the International Federation of Physician Assistant/Physician Associate/Clinical Officer/Clinical Associate/Comparable Student Association (IFPACS). [www.ifpacs.org](http://www.ifpacs.org). Detailed curricula mapping between countries is not currently available. Efforts to map the curricula through LOOOP, a German curriculum mapping software organization, is under way and analysis of the scope of practice documents have been collected and are currently being analyzed. It is the hope of this collective that by sharing this anthropological narrative that we increase recognition and unify the profession facilitating a more sustainable environment for this cadre to help fulfill the health care workforce gap. Together we are stronger.

Table 1: PA/PA-comparable professional titles

<b>Afghanistan:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Angola:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Australia:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Bangladesh:</b> Medical Assistant/Assistant Medical Officer <b>Botswana:</b> Doctor Assistant <b>Burkina Faso:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Burundi:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Bulgaria:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Canada:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Cape Verde:</b> Health Officer <b>China:</b> Medical Officer <b>Ethiopia:</b> Health Officer or Emergency Surgical Officer	<b>Gabon:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Germany:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Ghana:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Guinea Bissau:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Guyana:</b> Medical Extension Officer <b>India:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Ireland:</b> Physician Associate <b>Israel:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Kenya:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Laos:</b> Medical Assistant <b>Liberia:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Malaysia:</b> Assistant Medical Officer <b>Malawi:</b> Clinical Officer	<b>Mauritius:</b> Community Health Care Officer <b>Myanmar:</b> Health Officer <b>Namibia:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Nigeria:</b> Community Health Officer <b>Nepal:</b> Health Assistant <b>Netherlands:</b> Physician Assistant <b>New Zealand:</b> Physician Associate <b>Papua New Guinea:</b> Health Extension Officer <b>Russia:</b> Feldsher <b>Rwanda:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Saudi Arabia:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Senegal:</b> Health Officer	<b>Sierra Leone:</b> Community Health Officer <b>South Africa:</b> Clinical Associate <b>South Sudan:</b> Clinical Officer <b>Taiwan:</b> Physician Associate <b>Tanzania:</b> Assistant Medical Officer <b>Togo:</b> Medical Assistant <b>Tonga:</b> Health Officer <b>Uganda:</b> Clinical Officer <b>UK:</b> Physician Associate <b>USA:</b> Physician Assistant <b>Zambia:</b> Clinical Officer or Medical Licentiate <b>Zimbabwe:</b> Health Officer
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<https://www.internationalpas.org>

### Helpful Links

American Academy of PAs (AAPA): <https://www.aapa.org>

National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA): <http://nccpa.net>

Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA): <https://paeonline.org>

Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC): <http://arc-pa.org>

Physician Assistants for Global Health (PAGH): <https://www.pasforglobalhealth.com>

Society of European Physician Assistants

(SEPA): <https://www.facebook.com/100573998682/posts/10156755874828683?sfns=mo>

International Association of PA Educators (IAPAE): <https://iapae.com>

The European Network of PA-Educators (ENPAE): pending

EuroPAC: <http://europa-c.info>

Global Association of Clinical Officers and PAs

(GACOPA): <https://gacopa.org> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Brand/Gacopa-Rwanda-Conference-2020-1930563340590433/>

Australia Society of PAs ASPA: <http://www.aspa-australianpas.org/president.html>

Bangladesh Diploma Medical Association Central Committee: <https://bma.org.bd>

Canadian Association of PA: CAPA: <https://capa-acam.ca>

Professional Association of Emergency Surgical Officers of Ethiopia: <https://paesoe.org/about>  
Germany [www.hochschulverband-pa.de](http://www.hochschulverband-pa.de)

<https://www.pa-deutschland.de/>

Ghana Physician Assistants Association GPAA: <http://mygpaa.com>

India Association of PA:IAPA: <http://www.iapaonline.org>

Ireland: <https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/taught-courses/physician-associate-studies/why-rcsi-dublin>

Israel: <https://www.nbn.org.il/aliyahpedia/employment-israel/professions-index-employment-israel/medicine-health/physician-assistant/>

Kenya Clinical Officers Associations: Kenya: <https://kecoa.org>

Liberia National Physician Assistants Association –

LINPAA: <https://www.facebook.com/1669604179812370/posts/liberia-national-physician-assistants-association-linpaa-biennial-convention-und/1977526589020126/>

Physician Assistant Union of

Malawi PAUM: <https://www.facebook.com/physiciansassistantsunion/>

Malaysia Association of Medical Assistants: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Malaysian-Association-of-Medical-Assistants-MAMA/240006276038108>

Netherlands Association of PAs: NAPA: <https://www.napa.nl/english/>

New Zealand: <https://nzpas.org.nz>

Rwanda Medical Clinical Officers Association: <https://www.facebook.com/Rwandan-Medical-Clinical-Officers-RMCOs-1342960195750807/>

Scotland: <https://www.fparcp.co.uk>

Sierra Leone Association of Community Health Officers

(SLACHO) <https://www.facebook.com/slacho.org/>

Professional Association of Clinical Associates in South Africa South Africa

(PACASA): <https://www.facebook.com/ClinicalAssociatesRSA/>

Medical Clinical Officers Professional Uganda

Association: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Organization/Uganda-National-Clinical-officers-association-278168605539441/>

Faculty of Physician Associate UK FPA: <https://www.fparcp.co.uk>

Zambia clinical officer's association of Zambia; Zambia Medical Licentiate Practitioners

Association; <https://www.facebook.com/Clinical-Officers-Association-Of-Zambia-COAZ-463740806978970/>

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