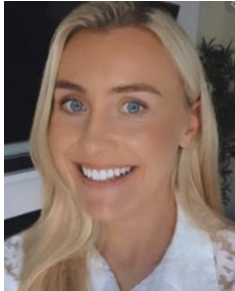


Ireland Physician Associates

Author Profile:

Maria Macken is a Physician Associate working in Orthopaedics and in 2017, graduated in the first cohort of PAs to train and qualify in Ireland. She is the current Chairperson of the Irish Society of Physician Associates (ISPA). physicianassociateireland@gmail.com



General Information:

The Physician Associate profession began in 2016 as a pilot-study. Four US / Canadian PAs began working in surgical specialities in a large teaching hospital in Dublin. That same year, six students commenced their training in the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin (RCSI). The students qualified as PAs at the end of 2017 and entered the Irish healthcare system in 2018.

There are 30 PAs in practice in Ireland. Twenty-six of these PAs trained in the RCSI, and four PAs trained in the UK.

Entry Criteria:

The Master's in Science (MSc) in Physician Associate Studies is a postgraduate qualification that includes extensive clinical placement. To be eligible for acceptance to and continuation on the programme, applicants must hold either a current valid EU passport or a current valid visa which entitles one to work in Ireland. Applicants must hold a level 8 Health Science or science-related degree with a minimum classification 2.2 award or equivalent qualification. Clinical experience is not required to matriculate into the educational programme; however, it is advised due to the high volume of applicants. There is no entrance exam required to enter the programme.

Education:

There is only one PA Programme in Ireland, the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin that admits 12-15 students per year. The program is the Master's in Science (MSc) in Physician Associate Studies, 123 St Stephens Green, Dublin 2: <https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/postgraduate/taught-courses/physician-associate-studies/why-rcsi-dublin>

The programme at RCSI is a Masters Level, Level 9 qualification. Students hoping to apply to this programme must be a graduate from a science, health-science or nursing degree. The programme duration is two years full time. There are between 12-15 students in each year. The course is delivered in a blended learning style, with a mix of lectures, small –group tutorials and problem-based-learning. Students will begin hospital placement after 9 months of theory. In their final year, students are required to undertake and carry out a dissertation. This is in the form of a Quality Improvement Project. Assessments and examinations are carried out throughout the two years and are in the form of MCQs, OSCEs, Long Cases and Written Assignments.

Financing Education:

Students must fund the course independently, bank loans and sponsorship from hospitals are also available.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

The RCSI is accredited by the National University of Ireland

The profession remains unregulated. The Irish Society of Physician Associates (ISPA) provides profession support to PAs working in Ireland and currently manages the Managed Voluntary Register (MVR).

The profession is not formally recognized by the Ministry of Health; however, they are aware that PAs are working within the Irish Health System. The Irish Society of Physician Associates is in the process of building relationships with the Ministry of Health and Department of Health

Professional Licensure:

PAs must pass the IPANE (Irish Physician Associate National Exam) before applying to work in Ireland. This is an MCQ style exam consisting of two papers, with approximately 100 questions per exam. The exam must be taken every six years.

The ISPA runs revision courses in advance of the National Exam. The ISPA is currently managed by PAs who are in clinical practice.

The managed voluntary registry (MVR) is managed by the ISPA Board. This is not publicly available.

Scope of Practice:

PAs diagnose, treat and manage patients under the guidance of their supervising consultant. PAs are trained under the medical model and are trained to take histories, perform physical examinations, order and carry out investigations, make diagnoses and devise management plans.

The majority of PAs work in hospital settings, however there are a small number of PAs working in primary care. The majority of PAs in Ireland work in surgical specialties; Orthopaedics, Neurosurgery, ENT, Vascular, Colorectal, Breast. However, the training allows PAs to work in both surgical and medical specialties, obs & gynae, paediatrics, psychiatry and primary care / family medicine.

All PAs have been working wither directly (redeployed to the frontline) or indirectly (working in a hospital with COVID 19 patients). At present, PAs in Ireland cannot prescribe medication or order any investigations involving the use of ionising radiation.

Maintaining Role:

Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Professional Development requires PAs must earn 50 CPD (continued professional development) points every year. These points can be earned by attending courses, conferences, as well as through journal clubs and multi-disciplinary team meetings.

All PAs are required to pass the Irish Physician Associate National Exam (IPANE). They are required to re-certify every 6 years.

Job Opportunities:

The majority of PAs work in urban areas, majority are in Dublin. Currently all registered PAs are in employment. All job advertisements are advertised via the ISPA. There are currently 31 PAs listed on the Managed Voluntary Register, 27 are Irish Trained, and 4 are UK trained.

References:

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