

Switzerland Physician Associates, Clinical Specialists

Author Profile:

Anita Manser Bonnard is the Head of Continuing Education at the Institute of Health Sciences at Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in Zurich, Switzerland. Her expertise and research interests include the building of new programs for continuing education in the Institute of Health Sciences including the new physician associate profession, school health professionals and health professions educators. Her research interests involve interprofessional teaching, training and counseling, formative psychology and management and leadership.



General Information:

The program began as a path for career progression for healthcare professionals in 2016 at the Kantonsspital Winterthur, Switzerland. The first certificate course began at Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in 2017.

Entry Criteria:

Applicants to the Clinical Specialist program must have a Bachelor of Science degree in a health profession or medical studies program such as nursing, physiotherapy, emergency care, or midwifery with at least 2 years of work experience. Additional health requirements include health professionals with NDE or additional training such as emergency/intensive and anesthesia care or higher professional training and at least one module of Clinical Assessment and Physical Examination and Reflective Practice - Understanding Science. There is no entry examination required to enter the program.

Education:

Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) currently is the only school in Switzerland with courses for Physician Associates/Clinical Specialist.

<https://www.zhaw.ch/de/gesundheit/weiterbildung/detail/kurs/mas-in-physician-associate-skills/>

There have been twenty graduates each year since 2017 and by the end of 2020 there will be 80 graduates. In 2021, the program will grow to matriculating 40 students as the interest level for this profession is very high.

Because students must have a Bachelor's degree and previous professional experience, ZHAW offers a Certificate of Advanced Studies, and since 2020 the program has been extended to offer a Master's of Advanced Studies in Physician Associate Skills. The development of a Bachelor's Physician Associate also started in 2020, and Zurich University of Applied Sciences is also planning to start with the Bachelor's Program in fall 2022.

Financing Education:

Certificate courses must be paid privately, however some hospitals reimburse for coursework and time in the program.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

In October 2020, The Swiss Medical Association decided to create the Physician Associate Office to work on accreditation.

As of 2020, The Swiss Medical Association will be the regulatory body for the profession.

The profession is not currently licensed, certified, or recognized by the Ministry of Health. Systems for licensure, certification and regulation are currently in development.

Professional Licensure:

The profession is not currently licensed. There is no certifying examination required to enter the profession.

Scope of Practice:

PAs work primarily in the surgical setting, but also in a number of other settings such as oncology, gerontology, rehabilitation, emergency units and family medicine. The scope of practice, including prescribing medication, is determined at the practice level between the PA and supervising physician and is variable dependent upon the setting and scope of practice of the supervising physician.

Maintaining Role:

In regard to Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Professional Development (CPD), the requirements differ by hospital.

Job Opportunities:

Throughout the country, job opportunities are increasing as more hospitals create new jobs. There are 20 physician assistants currently working in Switzerland.

References:

1. Kantonsspital Winterthur

2. Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Health Professions, <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/health/>