

Germany Physician Assistants

Author profile:

Marie Stolte, B.Sc. is a physician assistant who has practiced in geriatric medicine at St. Johannisstift hospital in Paderborn, Germany since 2018. She began her path to medicine as an operating room technician in 2012 and then worked on a medical project in Tanzania (RGV- Rainbow Garden Village). She then attended PA school at Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University Karlsruhe, graduating in 2018. During her surgical specialty training she worked in a large trauma center in Tübingen, Germany. In addition, she has been a medical volunteer on a number of projects including training in Regional Medical Center in Landstuhl (U.S. Army hospital). Ms. Stolte is an active member in German and international PA associations such as EuroPA-C, DGPA, and SEPA.



Prof. Dr. med. Peter Heistermann is Chairman of the German University Association Physician Assistant and Professor at Fliedner Fachhochschule Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth, Program Physician Assistant -Surgery B.Sc. ("Medizinische Assistenz -Chirurgie").



Prof. Dr. med. Peter Leonard Stollwerck is the former program director and lecturer at Fliedner Fachhochschule Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth, Physician Assistant - Surgery B.Sc.("Medizinische Assistenz - Chirurgie") and Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Hand Surgeon.



General Information:

The profession began in Germany in 2005 in response to need for additional personnel in surgical departments. In 2005 the first PA degree course with a focus on cardiac surgery was offered at the Steinbeis University in Berlin, introducing a new academic profession to the health system. In Germany, these professionals are called Physician Assistants (PA) and Medical Assistants – Surgery (MAC).

Entry Criteria:

The individual requirements for entering into a PA program differ due to state and university level regulations that vary throughout the country. All PA programs in Germany confer a Bachelor of Science degree. A Master's Degree is slated for 2021. Programs are typically three years with practical enrollment in a medical or surgical practice but may be longer if the applicants are attending part-time.

The main pathway to enter this type of program is by the applicant will earning the highest degree, known as Abitur, from secondary school and having at least 3 years of clinical experience from a practical based, clinical program, called "Ausbildung". Types of clinical programs include nursing, physiotherapy and operating room technician as well as others.

Another pathway for entry is by obtaining the "Fachhochschulreife" (advanced technical college certificate) degree from secondary school, the apprenticeship, and successful completion of a placement exam to ensure that the applicant has the sufficient knowledge to be successful in the program. These applicants should also have two years of working experience. If they have not qualified, they must attend educational health care programs that are full-time or longer than 3 years to ensure that the student receives sufficient clinical experience.

Education:

The first education program for PAs was developed by Steinbeis-Hochschule in Berlin in 2005 by Frank Merkle.

There are currently 15 PA educational programs running or shortly before the start in Germany. They are listed below:

- Berufsakademie Sachsen, Staatliche Studienakademie (Plauen) - University of Cooperative Education <http://www.ba-plauen.de/>

- CRMS Carl Remigius Medical School (Frankfurt / München / Hamburg / Meppen) <https://www.carl-remigius.de/>
- DHBW Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg (Karlsruhe) - Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University <https://www.dhbw.de/startseite>
- DHGS Deutsche Hochschule für Gesundheit und Sport <https://www.dhgs-hochschule.de/>
- EUFH Europäische Fachhochschule (Köln / Rheine / Rostock) - European University of Applied Sciences <https://www.eufh.de/>
- FFH Fliedner-Fachhochschule (Düsseldorf) - Fliedner University of Applied Sciences <https://www.fliedner-fachhochschule.de/>
- FHM Fachhochschule des Mittelstands (Bielefeld / Hannover / Bamberg) - University of Applied Sciences for SMEs <https://www.fh-mittelstand.de/>
- Hochschule Anhalt (Köthen) - Anhalt University of Applied Sciences <https://www.hs-anhalt.de/startseite.html>
- HSD Hochschule Döpfer (Köln / Regensburg) - Döpfer University of Applied Sciences <https://www.hs-doepper.de/>
- HS Neu-Ulm (Neu-Ulm) - Hochschule Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences <https://www.hnu.de/>
- ISBA Internationale Studien- und Berufsakademie (Heidelberg / Stuttgart) - ISBA University of Cooperative Education <https://www.isba-studium.de/>
- MSB Medical School (Berlin) <https://www.medicalschool-berlin.de/>
- OTH Ostbayerische technische Hochschule Amberg-Weiden (Weiden) - OTH – Technical University of Applied Sciences <https://www.oth-aw.de/>
- SRH (Gera / Heide / Leverkusen) - SRH Higher Education <https://www.srh-hochschulen.de/de/home/>
- Steinbeis Hochschule (Berlin) - Steinbeis-Transfer-Institut Medicine and Allied Health <https://www.dhzb.de/karriere/studium/bsc-physician-assistance>¹

Each program accepts between 10-100 students each year. Since 2008 748 students graduated in total. In 2020, there were 177 students graduated with 738 enrolled students, demonstrating considerable interest for this profession within Germany.

The curriculum is determined at the university level; however, the creation of a national curriculum is under development. Programs may be accredited by accreditation agencies authorized for this purpose by the German Accreditation Council.

Financing Education:

Students primarily pay fees for PA school themselves. In some cases, the employer may pay part of the fee or support the student and there are a few educational programs supported by the government.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

The German Accreditation Council was given the task of deciding on the accreditation of study programs (program accreditation) and the accreditation of quality management systems (system accreditation) on the basis of experts' reports.

There is no recognition by a governmental regulating body, as the concept of a Ministry of Health does not exist yet in Germany. There is no specific regulating body of the PA profession; instead regulation comes from social and civil law which governs the responsibilities and the functions of each occupational group in the medical field. In fact, the German social system does not hold a name for every different profession, but it sets the rights for the patients and the public health so there is no urgent need for any regulation by any governmental ministry.

Professional Licensure:

German PAs are not currently licensed. There are initiatives in Germany and in Europe to develop national and European-wide certification exam and licensing program. PAs do not have to take a national certification examination after graduation. There is no searchable database for PAs in the country with the exception of regular data collection by the German University Association Physician Assistant.

Scope of practice:

In Germany, PAs collaborate with physicians and the scope of practice is delegation based depending on the clinical experience of the PA and role of the supervising physician. They work to support and implement the medical plans of treatment through a collaborative, interdisciplinary and patient-based treatment approach. Physician assistants work in a variety of medical disciplines with a wide scope of practice.

Some of the tasks described in the scope of practice include: assisting in the operating room, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests, preparing and attending the ward rounds, answering patient questions, taking a medical history and performing physical exam, documentation, procedural skills, ordering consults and managing patients in a variety of acute and non-acute settings. PAs are not allowed to order diagnostic tests with ionizing radiation, prescribe medication, make a treatment clarification, give blood transfusion or perform a transplantation.

There are laws which prohibit special tasks and exercises with very specific exceptions for PhDs/MDs. This means that the PA can perform any tasks by delegation of his physician, as far his actions do not lead to an increase in risk for the patients. The following 10 laws are the only things explicit prohibited:

- Identification and treatment of communicable diseases
- Abortions
- Castration
- Organ removal from organ donors
- Blood transfusion
- Reproductive medicine
- Order and use of x-rays
- Administration and prescription of certain medications
- Prescription of certain medical devices
- Clarification before clinical trials

Maintaining Role:

At this time, there is no formal requirement for continuing education. The German Association of Physician Assistants (DGPA) is working to develop a system of ongoing educational requirements. Currently continuing educational programs are delivered at the yearly general meetings.

Job Opportunities:

Currently there are estimated to be 748 practicing PAs in Germany. Approximately 50 jobs are available each year. Employment opportunities are good, as demand is greater than supply. There are practically no unemployed PAs in Germany.

Questions answered by Marie Stolte B. Sc. PA , Deutsche Gesellschaft Physician Assistant (DGPA)
Alexander Rabih Spiecker B. Sc. PA, and, and Deutscher Hochschulverband Physician Assistant (DHPA)
Prof. Heistermann MD, and Prof. Stollwerck, MD

References:

Additional Information and links:

- www.pa-deutschland.de - Christoph Fessel M. Sc., PA, André Fischer B.Sc. PA, Alexander Rabih Spiecker B.Sc.PA, Sven Seelisch B.Sc. PA
- www.europa-c.net - Prof. Dr. med. Marcus Hoffmann, RA Dr. Peter Hüttl
- www.hochschulverband-pa.de - Prof. Dr. med. Peter Heistermann

Acknowledgements:

1 Information about education programs provided by the “Deutscher Hochschulverband Physician Assistant” - Prof. Dr. med. Peter Heistermann