

A NEW DATA COLLECTION MECHANISM IS EFFECTIVE IN PROVIDING INFORMATION TO INFORM WORKFORCE POLICY AND PLANNING

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The Bureau of Labor statistics expects the Physician Assistant (PA) profession to grow by 30% in ten years, much faster than the national average (71 new programs under development). Tracking data on the profession has become increasingly important given new attention to developing an evolving healthcare delivery system focused on team-based, interprofessional care. To address this need, the National Commission on Certification of PAs recently launched an online data collection tool. This tool provides a unique opportunity to collect a minimum data set on the profession that is integrally tied to the certification maintenance process. This poster describes the development, implementation and outcomes of the PA Professional Profile, a new data collection tool and process to inform workforce policy and planning.

Development of the data collection system included identification of relevant variables, creating an infrastructure for data entry, storage and retrieval, licensing and data sharing agreements, privacy and security policies and strategies to engage stakeholder buy-in. The PA Professional Profile and backend data warehouse consisted of three sections including "About Me", "My Practice" and a "New Graduate Profile". Information on 36 variables including key demographic and practice information related to geographic distribution, employment history, and a description of primary and secondary clinical positions. These data describe PA and supervising physician specialty and type of practice, proportion of time spent in activities (i.e. direct patient care and indirect services); patient services (i.e. diagnosis, treatment and care coordination), payer mix, plans for continued employment and salary information.

As of December 31st, 2012, 55,066 (61.0%) of certified PAs have completed the Profile, with the remainder expected to complete by the end of 2013, based on a two-year certification maintenance cycle. Preliminary data analysis on over 50 variables has now been completed. The "New Graduate" section was launched in January and collects information from new graduates and alumni of 172 programs. Examples of finding include: the profession is 67% female and 56% of PAs received a Master's degree upon program completion, with the rest receiving a Bachelor's, Associate's degree or informal training. Ninety-five percent are working in at least one clinical position with 33% working in general primary care; 46% have practiced in 2-3 clinical areas across their career. Approximately 14% percent practice in a rural or isolated community.

Integrating data collection into certification and/or licensure processes can be effective in providing information to inform workforce policy, planning and the development of education programs. Interest in the PA profession is growing globally. A dynamic database provides an opportunity to track important workforce data that can help inform educational program curriculum and workforce planning by highlighting practice patterns and trends in the delivery of health care services.