

Direct vs. Indirect Patient Care Experience

The program recognizes that both direct and indirect patient care experiences are vital components of the healthcare system and contribute meaningfully to the delivery of safe, effective, and coordinated care.

Indirect patient care includes roles that support or facilitate patient treatment without providing hands-on or face-to-face care. Examples include medical scribing, laboratory work, medical billing, and coding, data analysis, or administrative coordination. These experiences develop an understanding of healthcare systems, documentation processes, and interprofessional communication. While such roles provide valuable clinical exposure, they are not classified as direct patient care because they do not involve the physical delivery of care or independent patient interaction.

Direct patient care, in contrast, involves personal contact with patients in the process of providing medical or therapeutic services. Examples include taking vital signs, performing assessments, administering medications, assisting with procedures, or providing patient education and support. These experiences cultivate clinical judgement, empathy, communication, and hands-on skills essential for effective clinical practice.

Because the Physician Assistant/Associate role is fundamentally patient-facing and requires direct clinical engagement, only direct patient care experience will be considered toward the program's clinical experience requirement to ensure adequate preparation for PA-level responsibilities.

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Direct patient care includes any clinical interaction or activity in which an individual provides hands-on, face-to-face care to a patient. It involves personal contact with patients in the process of delivering medical or therapeutic services and may include assessing, diagnosing, treating, educating, or counseling patients directly to improve health outcomes.

- Example tasks:
 - Taking and recording vital signs (BP, temperature, heart rate, respirations, oxygen saturation)
 - Documenting changes in patient condition based on interactions with patient and monitoring of their condition
 - Measuring patient intake and output
 - Checking blood glucose levels
 - Performing pain assessments

- Starting an intravenous line
- Performing specimen collection or other diagnostics procedure
- Administering medications or treatments
- Providing wound care
- Counseling patients or families
- Inserting catheters, feeding tubes, or other medical devices
- Assisting with mobility or ambulation
- Performing EKGs
- Supporting patients in diagnostics tests or therapy sessions
- Assisting with bathing, dressing eating or toileting
- Providing oral hygiene or skin care
- Helping with feeding and/or positioning
- Providing comfort care (e.g. adjusting pillows, blankets)
- Teaching patients or families about medications, self-care, or discharge instructions
- Communicating care plans directly with patients
- Example roles:
 - Medical assistant
 - Certified nursing assistants
 - Registered nurses
 - Licensed practical nurses
 - Physical/occupational/speech therapists
 - Physical therapy aides
 - Respiratory therapists
 - Patient care technician
 - Radiology technologist
 - Emergency medical technician
 - Emergency room technician
 - Paramedic
 - Registered dietitian
 - Nutritionist
 - Behavior health technician
 - Surgical technologist

Indirect patient care is different from direct patient care. It is essential and includes tasks that support patient care but do not involve direct interaction with patients and/or support people.

- Example tasks:

- Charting and entering data into electronic health records (EHRs)
- Preparing or updating care plans
- Scheduling tests or follow-up appointments
- Communicating with other healthcare professionals without the patient present
- Ordering or stocking medical supplies
- Cleaning or setting up rooms and equipment
- Managing billing or insurance paperwork
- Conducting research or data analysis related to patient outcomes
- Reviewing lab results or imaging without direct patient contact
- Creating policies or educational materials
- Example roles:
 - Medical office administrator/practice manager
 - Health unit coordinator/ward clerk
 - Medical scheduler/patient access representative
 - Medical biller/coder
 - Lab technician/technologist (analyzes patient specimens but doesn't interact with patients regularly)
 - Pharmacy technician (prepares medications but doesn't interact with patient to administer them or educate about them)
 - Biomedical equipment technician
 - Clinical data analyst
 - Health information manager
 - Quality improvement coordinator
 - Risk management specialist
 - Medical researcher/clinical research coordinator
 - Public health analyst
 - Telehealth support technologist
 - Medical scribe (document and update charts by observing patient provider interactions or based on provider direction but does not interact directly with the patient)