

Physicians Associates - developing new roles in primary care

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Role of physicians associates (PAs) in general practice

- PAs are an additional role introduced in the NHS Workforce Plan to help to manage increasing demand in primary, secondary and community care
- Created to improve capacity and improve primary care access
- Not designed to replace GPs and nurses but to complement these roles
- PAs are dependent practitioners working with a dedicated medical supervisor

Qualifications & competence

- In 2006, the Department of Health released the 'Competence and Curriculum Framework for Physician Associates'
 - developed in partnership with Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and Royal College of Physicians (RCP)
- Science degree, followed by 2 year training in clinical medicine rotating through hospital and general practice
- On completion of the 2 year programme, the prospective PA has to pass the Physician Associate National Examination (PANE) in order to be certified by the Faculty of Physician Associates

Current RCGP position - March 2024

- PAs working in general practice must always work under the supervision of qualified GPs
- PAs must be considered additional members of the team, rather than substitutes for GPs
- PAs do not replace GPs or mitigate the need to urgently address the shortage of GPs
- PAs must be regulated as soon as possible
- Public awareness and understanding of the PA role must be improved

Current RCGP position - March 2024

- Training, induction and supervision of PAs within general practice must be properly designed and resourced
- At a time of significant GP workforce challenges, funding allocations, resources and learning opportunities within general practice must be prioritised for the training and retention of GPs
- The significant responsibility and skills required for supervision must be recognised and resourced, with GPs able to choose whether or not they are willing to undertake supervision of PAs. PAs should not be employed unless sufficient supervision can be provided.

Current situation in Southwark Primary Care Networks

- In March 2024 our Primary Care Networks employ PAs to complement the role of our GPs and nurses:
 - 23 PAs equivalent to 22.6 wte
 - across 7 practices
- Patients are usually informed about the role of the clinician who will attend to them when they book appointments
- All self-book appointments clearly state the type of clinician the patient is booking to see
- Our PAs always work under supervision of a GP

Current situation in Southwark Primary Care Networks

- Some of our GPs are involved in the training of PAs, majority of whom we have been able to employ locally
- PAs are involved in various quality development activities such as
 - quality improvement projects
 - clinical audits
 - complaints review
- We continue to raise awareness amongst our patients about all additional roles in primary care through our websites, patient engagement events, posters at practices as well as when we answer our phones