



MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program

School of Medicine, University of Washington

Technical Standards and Essential Requirements of Medical Education in the MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program: Admission, Retention and Graduation Standards

Introduction

Physician assistant (PA) training is recognized as a broad-based process requiring the acquisition of general knowledge in all fields of medicine and of the basic skills requisite for the practice of medicine regardless of specialty. The education of a PA requires assimilation of knowledge, acquisition of skills and development of judgment through patient care experience. This is in preparation for the semi-autonomous and appropriate decision-making required in the practice of medicine. Practicing medicine emphasizes collaboration among physicians, PAs, other allied healthcare professionals and patients.

Essential Requirements for Medical Education

The MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program at the University of Washington School of Medicine recognizes the PA certificate as a broad undifferentiated qualification requiring the acquisition of general knowledge and basic skills in all fields of medicine necessary to care for patients. The education of a PA requires assimilation of knowledge, acquisition of skills, and development of judgment through patient care experience in preparation for appropriate decisions required in practice. The current practice of medicine requires collaboration among physicians, PAs, other healthcare professionals, and patients and their families.

Within the standards set by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA), MEDEX Northwest has the ultimate responsibility for the selection of students, the design, implementation, evaluation of its curriculum, evaluation of students, and the determination of who should be awarded a PA certificate. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on prior satisfactory academic achievement but also on non-cognitive factors, which serve to insure that the candidate can complete the essential functions of the academic program required for graduation.

The process of continuous curriculum evaluation acknowledges a set of identified essential functions that determine the requirements for admission, retention, progression, and graduation of applicants and students respectively at the MEDEX Northwest PA program. Graduates are expected to be qualified to enter the profession and practice as a PA.

The MEDEX Northwest Program at the University of Washington School of Medicine endeavors to select applicants who have the ability to become highly competent PAs. The program's goal is to produce skilled individuals who can practice as PAs who put the patient first in the delivery

of safe and effective medical care. Technical standards have been developed and approved by the faculty, and reflect the essential relationship of PA-focused medical education to practice in the PA profession.

Technical Standards

Technical standards are academic standards that refer to those cognitive, behavioral, and physical abilities required for satisfactory completion of all aspects of the curriculum, and the development of professional attributes required by the faculty of all students approved to graduate with a PA certificate. The essential abilities required by the curriculum and for the practice of medicine are in the areas listed below and cannot be compromised without fundamentally threatening a patient's safety and well-being, the institution's educational mission, or the profession's social contract:

- Intellectual/Cognitive: conceptual, integrative, quantitative abilities for problem-solving and diagnosis
- Professionalism/Behavioral and Social Aspects of Performance
- Communication
- Physical and Mental Requirements

The individual must be able to function in his/her care and interactions with patients without the use of a surrogate in all of the above categories.

Intellectual/Cognitive: conceptual, integrative, quantitative abilities for problem solving and diagnosis

The MEDEX Northwest curriculum requires essential abilities in information acquisition. The student must have the ability to master information presented in course work through lectures, written material, projected images, and other forms of media and web-based presentations, and through simulations that require a variety of different skills.

The student must have the cognitive abilities necessary to master relevant content in basic science and clinical courses at a level deemed appropriate by the faculty. These skills may be described as the ability to comprehend, memorize, analyze, and synthesize material. He/she must be able to discern and comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships of structures and to develop reasoning and decision-making skills appropriate to the practice of medicine as a PA.

Professionalism/Behavioral and Social Aspects of Performance

The student must possess personal qualities, which include compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, responsibility, sensitivity to diversity, and tolerance. The student must understand and apply appropriate standards of medical ethics. The student must maintain appropriate professional boundaries within all settings, including those in which he/she is caring for patients

and their families or interacting with faculty, residents, peers, staff, and healthcare team members. The student must be able to function as a member of the healthcare team, often within a multidisciplinary team-based environment, regardless of the specialty.

Communication

The student must communicate effectively in English with patients and families, physicians, and other members of the healthcare team. The communication skills require the competency to process all information provided, including the recognition of the significance of non-verbal responses, to allow for appropriate, timely, well-focused follow-up inquiry. The student must be capable of responsive, empathetic communication to establish rapport in a way that promotes openness on issues of concern and sensitivity to potential cultural differences.

The student must process and communicate information on the patient's status in a timely manner with accuracy and in a succinct yet comprehensive manner to physician and PA colleagues as well as other members of the healthcare team in settings in which time available is limited. Written, dictated, or electronic medical record entries of patient assessments, treatment plans, prescriptions, etc., must be timely, complete and accurate. Ability to interact with, utilize, and navigate an electronic medical record is essential as this entails tasks such as entering orders, responding to electronic prompts, etc. Putting patient safety first, appropriate communication relies on the student recognizing he/she may lack the skills or knowledge to manage the situation and making a correct judgment to seek assistance and supervision in a timely manner.

Physical and Mental Requirements

The physical and mental requirements include essential abilities in the areas of observation and perception, sensory and tactile functions, fine and gross motor coordination, and stamina that are necessary in the examination, assessment, and care of patients.

The student must have the ability to take a medical history and perform a physical examination. Such tasks require the ability to communicate with the patient. The student will be required to perform a comprehensive physical examination.

The student must have the physical and emotional stamina, stability, and capacity to function in a competent manner in clinic, hospital, classroom, and laboratory settings that may involve heavy workloads, long hours, and stressful situations. The student must also be able to adapt to environments that may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways.

Policy Guidelines

The University of Washington MEDEX Northwest Program, has the responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates can become fully competent physician assistants, capable of fulfilling the Hippocratic duty "to benefit and do no harm". Thus, it is important that persons admitted

possess the intelligence, integrity, compassion, humanitarian concern, and physical and emotional capacity necessary to practice medicine as PAs.

As an accredited PA program, MEDEX Northwest adheres to the accreditation standards promulgated by the ARC-PA.

As part of the University of Washington, MEDEX Northwest is committed to the principle of equal opportunity. For example, the program does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, cultural or ethnic background, socio-economic status, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a veteran. See Executive Order 31: <http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/PO/EO31.html>.

While an individual's performance is impaired by abuse of alcohol or other substances, he/she is not a suitable candidate for admission, retention, progress, or graduation.

The intention of an applicant or student to practice a narrow part of clinical medicine or to pursue a non-clinical career does not alter the requirement that all PA students take and achieve competence in the full curriculum, and evaluations of academic and professional conduct.

PA students must continue to meet the MEDEX Northwest technical standards throughout their enrollment.

A student who has or develops a chronic disease or condition will be expected to seek and continue under the care of a licensed provider. However, should the student have or develop a condition or disability that would pose a health or safety risk to patients, self, or others and that could not be managed with a reasonable accommodation, the student may be placed on a mandated leave of absence or be dismissed from the MEDEX Northwest PA Program.

Applicants and students must meet the legal standards to be licensed to practice medicine in the States of Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana or Idaho. As such, candidates for admission must acknowledge and provide written explanation of any felony offense or disciplinary action taken against them prior to matriculation in MEDEX Northwest. In addition, should the student be arrested for or convicted of any felony offense while in the MEDEX program, s/he agrees to immediately notify the Program Director in writing as to the nature of the conviction. Failure to disclose prior or new offenses can lead to rescinding the offer of admission, disciplinary action, or dismissal.

Accommodations

Applicants to and students enrolled in the MEDEX Northwest program must follow the approved process for requesting and receiving appropriate reasonable accommodations to enable them to have the opportunity to meet the MEDEX program's technical standards and essential requirements for completion of the MEDEX PA curriculum and for the practice of medicine as a PA. Applicants and enrolled students are responsible for requesting accommodations and for providing the appropriate, required documentation of the disability in a timely manner to the

University's Disability Resources for Students (DRS) Office. The DRS Office will review the documentation and engage the MEDEX program and the student in an interactive process both to review accommodation requests in light of a student's functional limitations and the essential elements of the PA program and also to determine reasonable accommodation(s) on a case-by-case basis. See DRS Office webpage on process for new students.
<http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/prospective-students/getting-started/>.

A student who develops or manifests a disability after matriculation may be identified to the Director of Student Affairs through a variety of sources, e.g., self-report, a report of accident or illness, or faculty observations of special aspects of poor academic performance. If the degree to which the student has become disabled raises questions related to meeting the technical standards, the matter will be referred for consultation with the Disability for Resources for Students Office. The DRS Office will request that the student submit appropriate documentation in regard to the disability from a qualified health professional and will subsequently work with the student and the MEDEX faculty in assessing whether the student can meet the program's technical standards with a reasonable accommodation.

Reasonable accommodations are designed to effectively meet disability-related needs of qualified students, yet will not fundamentally alter essential elements of this program, create an undue burden for the University, or provide new programming for students with disabilities not available to all PA students. The MEDEX program is ultimately responsible for implementation of approved accommodations.

Technical Standards Expanded Examples

Note: Throughout the document, "student" refers to the applicant and PA student.

Intellectual/Cognitive

The student is expected to have essential abilities in information acquisition, integration, and problem-solving as an applicant and to gain and demonstrate higher levels of competence as he/she progresses through the PA program. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

The student must:

- measure, calculate, memorize, organize, analyze, comprehend, integrate, and synthesize material
- comprehend and apply written material at a level to be able to independently accomplish curricular requirements and provide clinical care for patients
- demonstrate cognitive abilities necessary to master relevant content in basic science and clinical courses deemed appropriate by the faculty through a variety of sources including lectures, written material, skills-based training, use of computers and other forms of media, and simulations

- discern and comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships of structures
- demonstrate reasoning, decision-making skills, and sound judgment appropriate to the practice of medicine
- solve problems rapidly; this critical skill demanded of PAs requires the ability to learn, reason, integrate, analyze, and synthesize data concurrently in a multi-task setting where there may be a high level of stress and distraction

Professionalism/Behavioral and Social Aspects of Performance

The student is expected to have essential abilities in behavioral and social attributes and professionalism as an applicant and to gain and demonstrate higher levels of competence as he/she progresses through the PA program. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

The student must:

- be respectful of patients, faculty, peers, and members of the PA program community: show up on time, be prepared, and wear appropriate dress
- take responsibility for his/her education; participate, contribute to the learning environment, and receive and act on constructive feedback from members of the PA program community and healthcare teams
- function as a contributing member of the healthcare team
- demonstrate integrity as manifested by truthfulness, acceptance of responsibility for one's actions, accountability for mistakes, and the ability to place the well-being of the patient above his/her own when necessary
- demonstrate empathy and concern for others while respecting appropriate personal and professional boundaries
- demonstrate the ability to develop mature, sensitive, and effective professional relationships with patients and all members of the PA program community and healthcare teams
- demonstrate attributes that include compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, responsibility, dedication, fairness, respect for self and others, and tolerance
- demonstrate sensitivity to diversity and different beliefs that may affect his/her interactions

- understand and apply appropriate ethical principles and standards of medical ethics within the setting in which he/she is caring for patients

Communication

The student is expected to have essential skills in communication as an applicant and to gain and demonstrate higher levels of competence as he/she progresses through the PA program. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

The student must:

- communicate effectively in English verbally and in writing or electronically in a variety of settings with patients and families, physicians, other members of the healthcare team, and peers; and have the ability to comprehend written communications
- have the ability to take a medical history and perform a physical examination, which includes the ability to communicate and interact with patients in an effective manner in order to elicit information, assess non-verbal communications, and describe changes in mood, activity, and posture; work effectively with a patient's interpreter when needed
- expediently assess all information including recognizing the significance of non-verbal responses to allow for appropriate, well-focused follow-up inquiry
- demonstrate communication skills that are essential for the formation of effective professional relationships with teachers and colleagues and therapeutic relationships with patients
- establish rapport in a way that promotes openness to the patient's concerns and sensitivity to potential cultural differences
- recognize urgent situations in which timely supervision, assistance, and consultation must be sought
- process and communicate information in a timely manner on the patient's status to physician colleagues, peers, and members of the healthcare team. This must be done with accuracy and in a succinct yet comprehensive manner in settings in which time available is limited
- write or dictate patient assessments, prescriptions, etc., that are complete and accurate and submitted in a timely manner
- give and receive constructive feedback, and demonstrate the ability to process feedback and utilize it to conform behavior to expected professional standards

Physical and Mental Requirements

The student is expected to have essential abilities in the areas of physical and mental requirements as an applicant and to gain and demonstrate higher levels of competence as he/she progresses through the PA program. The physical and mental requirements are in the areas of observation/perception/sensory/tactile, motor coordination/function, and stamina. Below are examples of the essential abilities in each of these areas.

Observation/Perception/Sensory/Tactile

The student is expected to have essential abilities in the areas of observation, perception, sensory, and tactile skills.

Students must be able to perceive by the use of senses the presentation of information through a variety of media. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- large group lectures
- demonstrations and laboratory experiments
- small group discussions and presentations, including team-based learning
- written material, audiovisual material, including computer-based material
- skills-based training
- simulations
- one-on-one interactions

The student must be capable of perceiving signs of disease and essential structures as demonstrated or taught in the foundation and clinical courses, such as anatomy and clinical medicine, and as manifested through the physical examination.

In addition, the following are essential to the practice of medicine:

- ability to distinguish normal from abnormal findings on physical examination
- patient encounter observations (at a distance and close at hand)

Motor Coordination/Function

The student is expected to have essential abilities in areas of motor coordination and function. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

The student must be able to execute motor movements reasonably required to provide general care and emergency treatment to patients. Such actions require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movements, balance and functional use of the senses. The student should have sufficient motor function to:

- perform within a reasonable time period appropriate to the patient care setting

- elicit information from patients by palpation, inspection, auscultation, percussion, and other diagnostic maneuvers
- perform diagnostic or therapeutic procedures
- respond and perform with precise, quick, and appropriate action in emergency situations
- complete timed demonstrations of skills
- perform routine invasive procedures including the use of universal precautions to avoid posing risks to patients and the student such as venipuncture
- function in outpatient, inpatient, surgical, and other procedural venues
- perform in a reasonably independent and competent way in sometimes chaotic clinical environments

Stamina

The student is expected to be able to meet the required physical and mental essential abilities as an applicant and to gain and demonstrate higher levels of competence as he/she progresses through the PA program. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

The student must:

- possess the emotional health required for appropriate utilization of intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, and the timely completion of all responsibilities attendant to their academic work, team work, and patient care. The student should be proactive in making use of available resources to help maintain both physical and mental health.
- have the emotional and psychological stability to function effectively under stress and to adapt to an environment that may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways.
- possess sufficient stamina to be able to tolerate demanding workloads.
- have the ability to adapt to changing environments, to display flexibility, and to learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the medical education and clinical practice settings.