

## **Making the Rounds**

Vol. 16 • Issue 2 • Page 10

Making the Rounds

By Stephen Cornell and Terri Schaefer

### **PA GROWTH PREDICTIONS**

#### **Is the PA Profession Still Hot?**

Rare is the published article about "hot professions" that doesn't include physician assistant. For most of the last decade, it seems PA has been a staple of everyone's top careers lists, from U.S. News and World Report and CNN to Money magazine and Kiplinger's.

But according to the latest projections from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, demand for the PA profession over the next eight years might not remain quite as strong as it has been.

The BLS projects the PA profession to grow at a rate of 27% between 2006 and 2016. Although that is much faster than the 10% growth projected for total employment in the United States during that period, the PA profession fell to No. 30 on the BLS list of fastest-growing professions. PA was No. 4 in the previous BLS projections.

Employment for PAs is still projected to grow "much faster than average" in the BLS's latest Occupational Outlook Handbook, which also states that "job opportunities for PAs should be good."

But the BLS projects a net growth of fewer than 18,000 PA jobs between 2006 and 2016 and only 83,000 total PA jobs in 2016. An estimated 68,124 PAs were already in clinical practice on Jan. 1, 2008, according to the AAPA, and roughly 4,500 new PAs graduate from PA programs each year.

Even with some PAs leaving the profession, the number of practicing PAs has increased by an average of about 4,400 a year over the last five years. The number of PAs in clinical practice climbed more than 22,000 between Jan. 1, 2003, and Jan. 1, 2008, from 46,002 to 68,124. Similar increases would result in far more than 83,000 PAs in 2016, and existing and new PA programs are expected to boost the number of annual PA graduates, at least slightly, in the near future.

Is the sky falling on the PA profession? Don't count on it, prominent PAs say. The BLS data is useful to project trends, and the healthy growth projections for the PA profession are a good sign.

"(BLS) predicted a gain in PA jobs of about 27%, so the numbers are very positive," AAPA president Gregor F. Bennett, MA, PA-C, says. "I think in 2016 that we're still going to find ourselves short tens of thousands of PAs."

The raw BLS jobs numbers probably are not 100% reliable, and health care workforce numbers are notoriously difficult to project accurately. No one expects a coming PA glut.

"The future is still blue skies (for the PA profession) as far as I'm concerned," says PA and health care economist Roderick S. Hooker, PhD, PA, who is director of rheumatology research at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Dallas and is a widely published researcher on PA workforce issues. "The future is extraordinary for PAs. I think that there's going to continue to be a doctor shortage, and there's going to be a PA shortage, as well."

According to the BLS, the top five fastest-growing professions between 2006 and 2016 will be networks systems and data communications analysts (53.4% increase), personal and home care aides (50.6%), home health aides (48.7%), computer applications software engineers (44.6%) and veterinary technologists and technicians (41.0%). Access the entire top 30 list online at [www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t06.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t06.htm).

## PAs AND THE PUBLIC EYE

### N.Y. Physicians Defend PA and PA Profession

When New York physician Anthony Colantonio, MD, publicly accused a PA of inappropriate patient treatment involving invasive procedures, the medical staff at Mercy Medical Center in Rockville Centre, N.Y., quickly organized an aggressive defense for the PA and the facility.

Colantonio "complained to several health and law-enforcement agencies" about the PA, according to a Feb. 10 article in the New York Post that sparked a barrage of publicity.

"Legislation must be passed to better protect patients from physician assistants," Colantonio told the Post.

Members of the Mercy Medical Center medical staff arranged a press conference for Feb. 14 and resolutely stood up for the hospital, the PA and the PA profession. Representatives from the New York State Society of Physician Assistants, the Association of Physician Assistants in Cardiovascular Surgery, the American College of Clinicians and the Hofstra University PA program attended the press conference.

Several of the hospital's prominent physicians spoke highly of the PA profession.

"I believe, as most in my profession do, in the team approach to patient care. One man or woman cannot do it alone. Physicians rely on physician assistants, who are well-trained, qualified and licensed professionals," said Mercy Medical Center director of orthopedic surgery Jan Koenig, MD. "Many hospitals rely on physician assistants to maintain the high level of quality care their patients deserve. I want to thank all of our physician assistants for the vital role they play in patient care. It is a pleasure to work with these talented, well-trained professionals."

Daniel Murphy, MD, who is director of emergency medicine at Mercy Medical Center, said, "[Colantonio] has preyed on a lack of public understanding of the role of valuable members of hospital care teams—physician assistants. He would have people believe that these dedicated professionals are unqualified and unsupervised, when the fact is that they are highly trained and perform their tasks at the direction of a physician and under the supervision of physicians. They are a valuable option available to physicians in providing the best care for their patients."

(ADVANCE editorial advisory board member Robert M. Blumm, RPA-C, MA, DFAAPA, contributed to this article.)

Further coverage of this story is available at [www.advancweb.com/pa](http://www.advancweb.com/pa).

## ADVANCING PA EDUCATION

### Now Independent, PAEA Comes of Age

When the Physician Assistant Education Association recently announced that it would not present educational sessions at the annual PA conference in San Antonio in May, it hardly came as a surprise. Since moving to independent management a few years ago, PAEA has strengthened its reputation as a solid organization.

PAEA intends to focus its efforts on the PAEA Annual Education Forum, which is becoming the association's signature event. The October 2007 forum in Tucson earned wide regard as its best-ever conference.

"It was exceptional. I think it was on a whole different level than our previous meetings," says PAEA immediate past president Anita Duhl Glicken, MSW, who also is the interim program director of the Child Health Associate/PA program at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. "I think it really embodied the spirit of the maturation of (PAEA) at this point."

As president, Glicken helped develop the plans for a more sophisticated, higher-profile PA education conference as part of PAEA's overall mission to become a leader in the world of health care education.

"As a PA educator, I think it's time for us to stop being the best-kept secret in medical education. And that's what we've been," Glicken says. "We have done many innovative things that have

gone on to be integrated into medical education. I wanted our conference to make us feel proud of being PA educators."

Emily WhiteHorse, PA-C, MA, who is the associate program director at the Touro University PA program in Vallejo, Calif., is in the midst of a three-year term as chair of PAEA's education committee after having served on the committee since 2001. Along with PAEA staff and the other committee members, WhiteHorse helped refine the procedures for evaluating proposals for educational sessions and tried to provide better guidelines for submitting proposals. PAEA eventually accepted 49 of the 130 proposals submitted for the 2007 forum.

"It's very competitive," WhiteHorse says. "I think (the changes) helped people, because it forced people to really think about what they wanted to present and how they wanted to present it. We made these changes in order to bring up the level in terms of the educational sessions."

PAEA put a lot of thought into inviting prominent speakers to address its membership about issues specific to PAs and PA education. For example, Reginald D. Carter, PhD, PA, director of the Physician Assistant History Office and the Society for the Preservation of PA History, addressed the conference, and his presence and talk helped current educators understand and embrace the already rich history of PA education, Glicken says.

PAEA also invited Richard Krugman, MD, who is dean of the University of Colorado School of Medicine and, at conference time, was chair of the executive committee of the Association of American Medical Colleges; and Francis S. Collins, MD, PhD, who is the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at the National Institutes of Health.

Krugman, who began his medical education career as a PA educator at the University of Colorado, has tremendous respect for the profession and for the innovations in medical education that have come directly from PA education, Glicken says. In his presentation, Krugman made clear the role that the PA profession has played in U.S. medical education. "He said that a lot of the features of current medical school curriculums were originally (developed) in PA education," Glicken says.

Collins spoke about the potential of the PA profession to translate breakthroughs in genetics into advances in patient care. "PAs are nimble and fearless," he said at the forum, adding that the adaptability of the PA curriculum and shorter training periods position PAs to be "prime candidate(s) to lead the incorporation of genomic research into clinical practice."

About 450 PA educators from U.S. and international PA programs attended the 2007 PAEA meeting, significantly more than ever before. Preliminary feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with 95% rating the meeting as good or excellent and only 5% rating it as average, WhiteHorse says. "Those are really high evaluations, but we're still looking at ways to continue to make this conference better."

PAEA is well into the planning for the 2008 Annual Education Forum in Savannah, Ga., from Oct. 29 through Nov. 2.

"I think that the success of our conference is a reflection of the organization," WhiteHorse says. "I think it speaks toward the bigger shift in the direction (of PAEA). The success of the meeting was a team effort, from the leadership and the board to the staff and the members of the committees. It reflects the growth and unity taking place within (PAEA)."

## ANNUAL PA CONFERENCE

### AAPA Prepares for San Antonio Event

Nearly 5,900 PAs and PA students attended the 2007 national PA conference in Philadelphia. The fact that 5,900 was considered a mild disappointment speaks to the impressive enduring popularity of the conference.

The AAPA's annual six-day conference is one of the largest annual medical conferences in the United States. This year's event will take place in San Antonio, May 24 through May 29.

Despite the increasing popularity of PA state and specialty conferences (see related feature article in this issue), the national PA conference remains the premier conference for the profession.

"Putting on this conference is quite a challenge," says Greg Thomas, PA, MPH, the AAPA vice president for professional education and alliance development. "It's difficult to be everything for everybody."

More than 7,300 people have attended the conference every year since 1999. Almost 11,000 people attended the 2004 conference in Las Vegas. This year's conference opens Saturday, May 24, with a general session, during which physician and author Carl A. Hammerschlag, MD, will deliver the keynote address.

Hammerschlag is a self-described authority in the practical applications of the science of psychoneuroimmunology, or mind-body-spirit medicine. He has worked for more than 20 years in Native American communities and has served as chief of psychiatry at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center in Arizona.

The AAPA House of Delegates meets for three days during the conference to consider policy. The HOD opens on the afternoon of May 24 and concludes on May 26. Educational sessions and hands-on workshops begin immediately after the general session on the Saturday morning and continue until 11:45 a.m. on Thursday, May 29.

The AAPA has scheduled more than 300 sessions and workshops during the conference. Educational sessions cover all specialties, although the academy does not group sessions about specific specialties by time or location.

"Over the years, we've had discussions of (specialty) tracks. We have not heard that PAs want it that way, so we haven't moved in that direction," Thomas says. "In some sense it occurs, but not

one (related) session after another. Each (session) is categorized by specialty area, and each one is labeled (by specialty)."

More than 200 companies and organizations will join ADVANCE for Physician Assistants in the exhibit hall from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on May 27 and May 28.

Although state and specialty PA conferences have grown significantly in recent years, giving PAs more choices for CME and PA networking opportunities, Thomas believes that the annual AAPA conference will continue to be successful and remain the largest meeting for the profession.

"Roughly 10% of all PAs attend. We still have great attendance," Thomas says. "I think (the AAPA conference) will always be seen as a very popular venue."

## PA PROGRAM NEWS

### Ohio College Set to Launch New Program

Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, in February announced the development of a new PA education program. Mount Union expects to enroll 25 to 30 students a year into the 24-month master's degree program beginning in 2009.

The program will be the first master's-level program at the Mount Union College in nearly 100 years. The college last offered a graduate degree program in 1912.

When the Mount Union program earns accreditation, it will bring the number of Ohio PA programs to six.

About 1,850 PAs are in practice in Ohio, which is ninth in the United States in total number of practicing PAs. But Ohio ranks 40th in PAs per capita.

Until recently, Ohio had been one of the only states that did not authorize PA prescribing. After protracted efforts by the Ohio Association of Physician Assistants, the state legislature passed PA prescribing legislation in 2006. Regulations authorizing PA prescribing in the state took effect last year.

Beginning on Jan. 1, 2008, PAs in Ohio are required to hold a master's degree or higher in order to "obtain a certificate to practice," according to OAPA. PAs who received an Ohio certificate to practice or who had been licensed to practice in another state before Jan. 1, 2008, are exempted from that requirement.

## FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS

### Entries Welcome for Family PA of the Year

Nominations are now being accepted for the fourth annual Family Practice Physician Assistant of the Year competition, sponsored by ADVANCE for Physician Assistants and the Association of Family Practice Physician Assistants. Other sponsors are Epocrates and Brymill Cryogenic Systems.

"We in the AFPPA are extremely pleased by the response to the Family Practice PA of the Year competition over the past three years, and we look forward to this year's submissions," says AFPPA president Lori Markowitz, MS, PA-C. "Our collaboration with ADVANCE has brought well-deserved recognition to the family medicine PA."

To enter the competition, nominators must answer seven questions about the family practice PA and submit the answers at the ADVANCE for Physician Assistants Web site, [www.advancweb.com/pa](http://www.advancweb.com/pa). PAs either can be nominated by another person or can self-nominate. The deadline for all entries is June 27, 2008.

AFPPA president-elect Jim Meeks, PA-C, offers insight for potential nominees.

"No great feats of superhuman strength are required. Most of us know someone who is one of those PAs who just does a good job. They do it every day and don't give it a second thought. They work hard. Their patients really appreciate it. Their coworkers admire them and respect them. This is what makes a PA the Family Practice PA of the year," he says.

This year's winner will receive a cash prize, a gift certificate to the ADVANCE Healthcare Shop and a commemorative plaque. In addition, if the winner attends the AFPPA annual conference in San Diego from Oct. 29 through Nov. 2, 2008, he or she will be awarded airfare, two nights' hotel stay and conference registration. See the contest advertisement in this issue for more details.

Grace Anne Siekman, PA-C, MPAS, BSN, of Stratton, Colo., was the 2007 Family Practice PA of the Year. Seikman founded and is the sole provider of Stratton Medical Clinic. The 2006 winner, Pedro Gonzalez, PA-C, of Los Angeles, works at three inner-city clinics and also is the co-founder and co-creator of the bakery Mi Vida-My Life. The 2005 winner, Donna Johnson, PA-C, of Brighton, Colo., works at Thornton Medical Center in Thornton, Colo.

ADVANCE for Physician Assistants is the official journal of the AFPPA.

For more information on the fourth annual ADVANCE and AFPPA Family Practice Physician Assistant of the Year competition, visit ADVANCE online at [www.advancweb.com/pa](http://www.advancweb.com/pa).

## FEDERAL AFFAIRS

Expert PA Testifies Before U.S. Senate

Roderick S. Hooker, PhD, PA, testified about future health care workforce issues before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on Feb. 12.

Hooker, who is director of rheumatology research at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Dallas, was one of nine health care experts invited to be part of a panel. Hooker testified about the primary care health workforce and reauthorization of the Public Health Service Act's Title VII Health Professions Programs, which have received significantly reduced levels of funding in recent years.

Some PA programs receive grants through these programs' cluster on primary care medicine and dentistry, and Hooker spoke about PAs and the need to fund these educational programs.

"The Title VII Health Professions Programs needs to be reauthorized by the 110th Congress. Little needs to be tweaked or substantially changed during the reauthorization process," he testified to the committee. "I do, however, believe that Title VII needs to be reinvigorated, valued, and recognized as providing an important public good. Evidence now supports the notion that Title VII has lived up to the expectations of its early creators. Support for the education of primary care providers is sorely needed. There is a pressing need to recruit underrepresented minorities and disadvantaged populations."

Hooker's testimony is available at [http://www.help.senate.gov/Hearings/2008\\_02\\_12/Hooker.pdf](http://www.help.senate.gov/Hearings/2008_02_12/Hooker.pdf).

Hooker was the only PA to address the committee on Feb. 12. Other prominent experts invited to testify included Kevin Grumbach, MD, who is the chair of the department of family and community medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, and the director of the UCSF Center for California Health Workforce Studies; and Edward S. Salsberg, MPA, who is the director of the Association of American Medical Colleges' Center for Workforce Studies.