

OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE: Physician Assistants

By Michael Polzella, Associate Research Analyst

Physician assistants, also known as PAs, practice medicine under the direction of physicians and surgeons. They are formally trained to examine patients, diagnose injuries and illnesses, and provide treatment.¹

According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the Physician Assistant (PA) profession was created to improve and expand healthcare. "In the mid-1960s, physicians and educators recognized there was a shortage of primary care physicians. To remedy this, Eugene A. Stead Jr., MD, of the Duke University Medical Center put together the first class of PAs in 1965. He selected Navy corpsmen who had received considerable medical training during their military service and based the curriculum on his knowledge of the fast-track training of doctors during World War II."²

Presently most applicants to physician assistant education programs already have a bachelor's degree and some healthcare-related experience. In many cases, the applicants have worked as registered nurses, emergency medical technicians (EMTs) or paramedics. The education programs usually take at least two years of full time study. In 2011, "the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant accredited 165 programs"³ around the country.

The educational program consists of classroom and laboratory instruction as well as supervised clinical training.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS						
Area	Employment	Location Quotient	Average Wage		Median Wage	
			Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
U.S.	83,640	1.00	\$44.45	\$92,460	\$43.72	\$90,930
Connecticut	1,490	1.43	\$50.26	\$104,540	\$50.18	\$104,380
Maine	900	2.40	\$47.38	\$98,560	\$44.79	\$93,160
Massachusetts	2,820	1.37	\$41.56	\$86,440	\$44.24	\$92,020
Rhode Island	190	0.67	\$53.97	\$112,250	\$51.59	\$107,300
Vermont	300	1.60	\$43.32	\$90,100	\$43.16	\$89,760

Areas of instruction include pathology, human anatomy, physiology and clinical medicine while areas of clinical training include family medicine, internal medicine, emergency medicine and pediatrics.

All 50 States and the District of Columbia require physician assistants to be licensed. This license allows the PA to practice and prescribe medicine. A recertification exam must be taken and passed every six years. Completion of an alternative program combining training and a take-home exam is also acceptable.

The location quotient is the ratio of the area concentration of occupational employment to the national average concentration. The table shows that except for Rhode Island, New England States have a higher share of Physician Assistants than the U.S. average concentration. Similarly, with the exclusion of Vermont, Physician Assistants in the New England States earn more than the median salary across the country. In Connecticut, PAs

earn 15 percent more while in Rhode Island the PAs make 18 percent more.

Nationally, the job outlook for Physician Assistants is good as growth is projected at 30 percent from 2010-2020. All of the New England States are also projecting growth over the ten year span, with Connecticut anticipating the largest at 22 percent, followed by Massachusetts at 18 percent.

Considering the combination of high wage earnings, abundant education/training programs and the projection of job growth, the occupation of Physician Assistant in the New England States seems to be a fairly recession proof occupation like many in the health services industry. ■

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*

² American Academy of Physician Assistants, Website www.aapa.org

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*

GENERAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS

<i>(Seasonally adjusted)</i>	2Q	2Q	CHANGE		1Q
	2013	2012	NO.	%	2013
General Drift Indicator (1986=100)*					
Leading	107.7	105.4	2.3	2.2	108.7
Coincident	108.5	107.9	0.6	0.6	107.8
Farmington Bank Business Barometer (1992=100)**	125.7	124.9	0.8	0.6	125.0
Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index (July 1992=100)***	OCT	OCT			SEP
<i>(Seasonally adjusted)</i>	2013	2012			2013
Connecticut	154.73	150.16	4.57	3.0	154.25
United States	156.43	151.97	4.46	2.9	156.06

Sources: *The Connecticut Economy, University of Connecticut **Farmington Bank ***Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

The Connecticut Economy's **General Drift Indicators** are composite measures of the four-quarter change in three coincident (Connecticut Manufacturing Production Index, nonfarm employment, and real personal income) and four leading (housing permits, manufacturing average weekly hours, Hartford help-wanted advertising, and initial unemployment claims) economic variables, and are indexed so 1986 = 100.

The **Farmington Bank Business Barometer** is a measure of overall economic growth in the state of Connecticut that is derived from non-manufacturing employment, real disposable personal income, and manufacturing production.

The **Philadelphia Fed's Coincident Index** summarizes current economic condition by using four coincident variables: nonfarm payroll employment, average hours worked in manufacturing, the unemployment rate, and wage and salary disbursements deflated by the consumer price index (U.S. city average).