

Chapter 39

TRAINING WITH INDUSTRY PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

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Introduction

Physician assistants (PAs) have the opportunity to broaden their skills and knowledge by competing for participation in a Training With Industry (TWI) program. Depending on which program they apply for, the experience can broaden their knowledge of legislative and national affairs. This chapter discusses the requirements and options to compete for TWI. The three primary agencies partnering with the Army in running these programs for PAs are the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA), and the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT). These partnerships provide an opportunity for PAs to exchange knowledge and ideas with their civilian counterparts, and to bring what they learn back to the Army. This exchange ensures the Army stays relevant with respect to PA training, regulations, and certifications, and the profession remains in line with the civilian workforce.

Duties and Responsibilities

Army PAs selected for the TWI program will have duties consistent with the goals of the organization they are working for. Duties may include lengthy research projects, data entry, reviewing protocols, and advising internal committees. Other projects may include state law reviews, preparing for the AAPA annual conference, curriculum development for emergency medical technicians, continuing medical education

(CME) development, and contributing to NCCPA test development. Additionally, to facilitate integration of Army medicine goals with project development, PAs should develop working relationships with Army leaders.

Requirements

Requirements to compete for TWI, released in annual military personnel (MILPER) messages, may vary from year to year but often include the following elements.¹ Applicants must:

- be a graduate of the Captains Career Course, if a first lieutenant (promotable) or higher¹;
- be a graduate of Intermediate Level Education, if a major (promotable) or higher;
- have 4 to 13 years of active federal commissioned service (waiver eligible);
- have sufficient remaining service upon completion of training to fulfill the incurred active duty service obligation (ADSO);
- not be in a non-select promotable status (waiver ineligible);
- have 3 years of clinical experience by course date (waiver eligible); and
- have passed the Army Combat Fitness Test and complied with height/weight standards within 6 months of application.

Additionally, overseas applicants must have complete their prescribed overseas tour, include any previously approved extensions, before starting the program.

Desired Skills and Attributes

Applicants should be hard working, productive, and insightful, and have the following skills and abilities:

- strong communication skills;
- ability to work well with both military and civilian organizations;
- excellent customer service skills; and
- superb written and verbal communication skills.

Organizations Available for Training Programs

American Academy of Physician Assistants

The AAPA is the national professional society for PAs. Representing more than 140,000 PAs, it advocates and educates on behalf of the profession to improve quality, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness of patient-centered health care.² Some of the key sections to explore within the AAPA are:

- **The PA Foundation.** A nonprofit, philanthropic section of the AAPA that provides resources for PAs and PA students to improve their communities.
- **Advocacy and Government Affairs.** Efforts by the organization to promote the profession at the state and national level, including within the Department of Defense.
- **Education.** Development and certification of CME within the profession, including the annual AAPA conference and multiple other opportunities. The education department frequently conducts research within the profession as well; recurring projects include the annual salary survey and surveys to identify the need for CME.
- **The Center for Healthcare and Leadership Management.** Provides strategic and operational guidance on how to best utilize PAs within an organization.

National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants

The NCCPA is the only certifying organization for PAs in the United States. It ensures that PAs meet established standards of knowledge and clinical skills upon entry into practice and throughout their careers.³ While the NCCPA is most known for developing of the Physician Assistant National Certification Exam (PANCE), it has other components that contribute to the profession as well. Like the AAPA, the NCCPA works with lawmakers on legislation that drives the profession and some state laws. Some other key sections in the NCCPA are:

- **The NCCPA Health Foundation.** A nonprofit organization designed to promote the PA profession; improve patient care; and collaborate with partners to advance the role of certified PAs and improve health.⁴

- **The PA History Society.** Shares the history and development of the PA profession and how PAs continue to make a difference in society.⁵

National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians

The NREMT provides a valid, uniform process to assess the knowledge and skills required for competent practice by emergency medical services professionals throughout their careers. The organization also maintains a registry of certification status.^{6,7} Because all combat medics (68W) are required to maintain their certification with NREMT, in accordance with Army Regulation 40-68,⁷ an ongoing collaboration can improve opportunities and training for Army combat medics and civilian paramedics, potentially impacting all of the medical care in the Army. Training with the NREMT provides PAs with the opportunity not only to learn about training and testing associated with certification maintenance, but also to see how the newest changes are pushed to the profession and how instruction and training will need to adapt to meet standards in training and care.

Key Facts

The TWI program provides a unique opportunity for competitively selected officers and noncommissioned officers to learn managerial techniques and skills specific to their profession. This training is otherwise not available through the military or civilian school systems. Following the participants' tenure in the TWI program, they are placed in a validated utilization assignment for 2 years. Participants also incur an ADSO of 3:1 ratio computed in days, which is currently 3 years.⁸ Ideally, PAs who complete the training will fill the ADSO in utilization tours and share what they have learned with the profession. Potential utilization tours include serving in the Interservice Physician Assistant Program and instructing medics at the Department of Combat Medic Training at the Army Medical Center of Excellence at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Tips for Success

- Several TWI opportunities for PAs directly deal with governance and legislative processes. The trainee should ensure they know

the current Army goals in these areas, and they must be able to distinguish between their own views and the Army's vision.

- Engage key leaders early and often to maintain collaborative efforts.
- Engage career managers before applying to ensure engagement timelines will line up with career timelines.
- Know the roles of medics, the training and credentials they are required to maintain, and efficiencies and deficiencies of medic training at various installations—some have robust training while others struggle to maintain credentials for medics. Newly trained PAs may have an opportunity to narrow the education divide.
- Know the resources available at training sites that include DHA (Defense Health Agency) military medical treatment facilities.
- Be familiar with state and national laws, as well as regulations that cover PAs. There may be opportunity to improve both through improved regulations, laws, and collaborative projects.

Conclusion

The Army TWI program provides opportunities for PAs to collaborate with civilian counterparts in multiple facets of the profession. By participating in these programs, PAs within the Army gain insight into advocacy, training, credentialing, certification, and many other professional considerations. TWI programs allow Army PAs to maintain first-hand knowledge of major transitions within the profession and enable Army doctrine and recommendations to stay up to date and relevant.

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