

US Army
Physician Assistant
Handbook

Second Edition

*Borden Institute
US Army Medical Center of Excellence
Fort Sam Houston, Texas*

*Office of The Surgeon General
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Falls Church, Virginia*

2021

“All Gave Some, Some Gave All”

In Memoriam to Our Fallen Physician Assistants . . .

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. . . From the Line, For the Line.



Officer Candidate Jessica Martin, an Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) Phase 2 student from William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, participates in a suture and wound closure training at WBAMC's Simulation Center on March 9, 2018. Photo by March Sanchez. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4241463/revamped-curricula-wbamcs-sim-center-aims-increase-safety-readiness>

Lieutenant Colonel Avery Carney, the IPAP Phase 2 Clinical Coordinator at Evans Army Community Hospital, Fort Carson, Colorado, gives Captain Nelson Liuzzo his diploma during their graduation on October 5, 2018. Photo by Alexandra Shea. <https://www.fortcarsonmountaineer.com/2018/10/ipap-graduation/>



First Lieutenant Jamie Mueller treats a patient at Forward Operating Base Spin Boldak, Afghanistan, on April 30, 2014. US Army photo. <https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122192>



Colonel (Retired) Louis H. Smith, III, the third Chief of the PA Section from 1998 to 2002, congratulates Colonel John Balsler during COL Balsler's swearing in ceremony as the 19th Army Medical Specialist (SP) Corps Chief on March 30, 2017. COL Balsler is the first PA selected as the SP Corps Chief and he was the Chief of the PA Section from 2010 to 2014. Photo courtesy of Colonel Jeffrey Oliver.



- *Lieutenant Colonel John F. Detro, the incoming commander of the 187th*
- *Medical Battalion, accepts the guidon from Colonel Scott Drennon,*
- *commander of the US Medical Department Center and School Academy*
- *Brigade (P), while Lieutenant Colonel Jodi Dugai, the outgoing commander,*
- *looks on; September 12, 2016. Photo courtesy of MEDCoE PAO.*



Captain Christine Cabal, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Vilseck, Germany, takes care of a patient during a training exercise in September 2019. Photo by Wesley Elliott. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5790944/army-physician-assistants-embrace-continued-front-line-roles-midst-transitions>

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57. Role of the Combat Training Center Command Surgeon
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We dedicate this handbook to past Physician Assistants who forged the path that shaped our current environment. This second edition commemorates their legacy and achievements; may they never be forgotten. This handbook is also dedicated to the Physician Assistants stationed worldwide who are currently serving our nation.

The handbook propagates the illustrious narrative of the US Army Physician Assistant. Our hope is that this handbook will be worn and tattered from use, displayed prominently, and esteemed as a useful resource. We are honored to have had the pleasure and privilege to lead this literary effort, and we look forward to what the future generation of Physician Assistants will produce for the follow-on editions of the handbook.

“From the Line . . . for the Line.”

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Foreword

The Army's priorities have expanded and are comprised of people, readiness, modernization, and reform. Accordingly, the Military Health System transformation is a critical time for Army Medicine to ensure there are no gaps or decreases in the quality of healthcare provided to our Soldiers, Families, Civilians, and Soldiers for Life—because people matter. Army Physician Assistants (PAs) are key enablers of Army Medicine's provision of sustained health services at home and in combat operations, and as such, are inevitably present from the “Foxhole to Fixed Facility.” Army PAs serve in operational units on the front lines with our troops in every country our forces are deployed. They work in our clinics to provide the full spectrum of care for patients, spearhead preventive healthcare and performance optimization initiatives, and are pivotal in the design and transformation of the Military Health System. PAs command our clinics and field hospitals, and serve as senior staff in all of our formations.

The history of the modern PA profession is rooted in military tradition. In 1965, Dr. Eugene Stead announced the Nation's first “physician assistant program” at Duke University and accepted four Vietnam Veteran Navy Medical Corpsmen to the inaugural class. In 1971, the Army began the Medical Field Service Physician Assistant Program at Fort Sam Houston, Texas—and to this day, Army PA candidates selected primarily from currently serving Soldiers are educated through rigorous graduate-level programs such as the Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) at the Medical Center of Excellence.

It is with tremendous honor that I present the second edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*. The second edition not only updates content from the previous edition, but also expands upon the information available to the Army PA. This handbook is the collaboration of PAs past and present and enhances shared understanding, learning, and decision-making; a sharing of knowledge.

Army PAs are the face of the Army Medicine provider to the line and will continue to serve as members of our cohesive team taking care of Soldiers. Army PAs are agile, adaptable, versatile, and innovative in their ability to meet the ever-changing challenges of today and

tomorrow. I'm proud of Army PAs and their work to take care of the Nation's greatest treasure: the men and women of the Armed Services, their Families, and our retirees.

Army Medicine is Army Strong!

TSG 45

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R. SCOTT DINGLE
Lieutenant General, US Army
The Surgeon General and
Commanding General, USAMEDCOM

Preface

The US military is approaching a milestone no one predicted when America was attacked on September 11, 2001. As the 20-year mark of the Nation's longest war nears, one of the most commendable achievements is the extraordinary care our medical teams have provided Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen, on and off the battlefield. While our education and training, advanced technology, and enhanced techniques certainly factor in, it's the devotion of our medical teams that is the foundation of our improved outcomes. Physician Assistants have never served a more important role on those teams.

Deploying as a general surgeon in the Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan theaters, I've had hundreds of experiences with casualties, most of them Soldiers and Marines wounded in combat and in need of surgical intervention. There's no doubt in my mind we have the highest survival rates and limb salvage rates in history because of our medics and corpsmen on the battlefield. They're the best in the world. The largely untold story is why they're so good.

The truth of the matter is, the best medics came from units with the best PAs. And the best PAs were not only superb practitioners, they were also great teachers; attentive to their responsibility to provide sustainment training for their medics. I saw it over and over again. When a Soldier or Marine came in with devastating injuries, those that had the best chance for survival almost invariably were treated by medics who had done everything right. They had the best chance of returning home to their families because the PAs in those units were always helping their medics. We owe nothing less to our warfighters, the best America has to offer.

I saw the extraordinary partners PAs were to all of the doctors, and in particular the surgeons, when I was the Chief of Surgery then Deputy Commander of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center early in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. This was never more obvious than when casualties markedly increased patient loads. The general practice PAs were the combat multipliers of the MTF, treating everything from anxiety disorder to gastroenteritis. Specialty PAs were the physician extenders we needed, providing a significant amount of direct patient care, freeing up physicians to be where we needed them the most; carrying out the evaluations and procedures only they could perform.

I've served with hundreds of PAs during my 30+ years as an Army surgeon. As a former Military Medical Treatment Facility Commander, Regional Commander, and now as the Director of the Defense Health Agency, I appreciate the competence, commitment, and compassion you bring to the military medical profession. For these reasons and so many more, I'm extremely grateful for the privilege to present the second edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*. Thanks for your continuing service to the men and women of our Armed Forces, and the Families who support them!

RONALD J. PLACE, MD
Lieutenant General, US Army
Director, Defense Health Agency

Prologue

The medical readiness of the force now and in the future is paramount. The US Army Medical Center of Excellence (MEDCoE) is responsible for envisioning and designing the responsive Army Medicine capabilities and structure that support the fielded force and the future force. As one of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)'s ten Centers of Excellence, MEDCoE trains, educates, and inspires medical personnel to conduct medical operations in unified land operations and the multi-domain operational design of the future. Battle-focused training is the most crucial activity MEDCoE Soldiers and trainees do to achieve readiness. US Army physician assistants (PAs) have played an essential role in ensuring readiness since they first began serving in the 1970s. The PA initially met a need for healthcare providers which greatly expanded during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts of the 21st century. As the PA profession continued to grow, a need for a mentorship program developed, which led a group of PAs to write the first *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*.

This second edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook* takes into account the changes in military medicine since the first edition was published in 2018. A comprehensive transformation occurred with the move of Army medical training to TRADOC, the transition of military medical treatment facilities to the Defense Health Agency, and research activities aligning with Army Futures Command. Army PAs are essential in this time of transition, using their clinical, educational, research, leadership, and management skills to maintain the highest quality of medical training as the command structure changes.

Today, Army PAs are integral to training activity in numerous positions and roles at MEDCoE: Interservice PA Program Director/Associate professors, combat medicine training instructors, and commanders of training companies and battalions. Army PAs are contributing to readiness of the force by training Soldiers in tactical and technical competencies to build and sustain operational capabilities. Army PAs are critical to Army Medicine's ability to ensure the health of the maneuver element during competition, preserve Soldier lethality in conflict, and facilitate a return to competition. By leading their

profession in meeting the changing mission and training demands in the 21st century and beyond, Army PAs are a true embodiment of their motto, “From the Line ... For the Line.”

DENNIS P. LEMASTER
Major General, US Army
Commanding

19th Army Medical Specialist Corps Chief Message

This second edition is an expansion on a very successful first edition launch of a handbook that, while intended as a guide for Physician Assistants, has touched on many aspects of Army Medicine. We will see significant changes when the Defense Health Agency (DHA) fully assumes the role of managing all the military medical treatment facilities, but PAs and the Specialist Corps will continue as the backbone of soldiers' medical care.

As Corps Chief, my job was to ensure that all components of the Corps (Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Dietitians, and Physician Assistants) deliver the capabilities that the Army expects from these experts. The newest initiative is the Specialist Corps-driven Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) program. These H2F providers are assigned to maneuver units working alongside the Physician Assistants already embedded in these units. This marriage shows what can be accomplished when the strength of the entire Corps works together. Working with the line as a collective group maintains the significant fighting strength the Army needs in any operational theater.

What about the future? Physician Assistants are popular and will continue to be a vital component of operational units. The DHA is the way forward, and as time goes by, we will likely see more collaboration between the various branches of the military, cementing our place in operational medicine. Likewise, many talented individuals have opened the door for leadership opportunities and proved that a PA is a capable leader at all echelons of command. There will always be a need for leaders in our various medical units, and this is a place where all those coming up through the ranks can take advantage of previous efforts and excel where others have paved the way. Rank opportunities have increased, and so it is up to those future individuals to carry the torch and forge new frontiers.

We are in an exciting time, and the future script is unwritten. I hope that the time and effort that has gone into this handbook is helpful and appreciated. Feel free to share it with others in the medical community because initiatives like this set us apart. Keep the machine moving!

Colonel John Balsler, PA-C, MPAS, MSS
19th Army Medical Specialist Corps Chief

20th Army Medical Specialist Corps Chief Message

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.” – Joseph Addison

The mission of the Army Medical Specialist (SP) Corps is to develop Corps leaders who enhance Soldier health and readiness in garrison and throughout multi-domain operations (MDOs). The Army PA Handbook, now in its second edition, provides an amazing resource to help our Corps reach our vision: to lead the advancement of Soldier health and readiness.

As the 20th Army Medical Specialist Corps Chief, I am honored and humbled to have witnessed the impact of Army PAs on the health and readiness of the force. Since joining the SP Corps in 1992, PAs have enhanced Corps capabilities in support of the total force. I have been fortunate to have worked with our best PAs in garrison and in deployed settings. This second edition of the PA Handbook highlights the value of Army PAs, which I have had the luxury of experiencing firsthand.

Gustave Flaubert stated, “The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.” The Army PA serves a fundamental role in supporting Army Medicine’s priorities in taking care of our people, enhancing battlefield medicine, and streamlining early identification and treatment of illness and injuries. Army PAs leverage their clinical, research, and force development expertise in ensuring the SP Corps delivers solutions in garrison, across MDOs, and in large-scale combat operations; in writing this handbook, they have shown the breadth and depth of their mission. Benjamin Franklin once stated, “Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.” This handbook exemplifies both. The number of Army PAs who leveraged their experiences to contribute is impressive and clearly demonstrates their tradition of sharing the roles and responsibilities of Army PAs. This edition has been expanded to include collaborative efforts with Compos 2 and 3, new roles, and lessons learned and tips for success. Additionally, our Army PAs have proven themselves at strategic, operational, and tactical environments; this second edition highlights the holistic impact of the Army’s PAs on readiness. As the table of contents shows, this handbook is not just for Army PAs; it is also worth reading by anyone interested in military professional and personal development.

I am proud of our team’s collaboration. The future of Army PAs remains bright. Stay fit!

Colonel Deydre S. Teyhen, DPT, PhD
20th Army Medical Specialist Corps Chief

Introduction and Acknowledgements

For almost 50 years, Army Physician Assistants (PAs) have supported the US Army by ensuring the military force is both ready to fight today and prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. Since the inception of the PA profession, military PAs have demonstrated that they are versatile and adaptable force multipliers, performing essential work in a variety of environments ranging from combat outposts to clinics and command suites. The role of the Army PA has evolved since the early 1990s when they first became commissioned officers. Over the years, the PA position has been tailored according to changing needs of the Army. Army PAs provide a wide range of care at each level, or echelon, of care, from emergency and life-saving treatment at the point of injury, to routine care or wellness visits, to specialty services such as orthopedics, emergency medicine, general surgery, and behavioral health, as well as serving in staff roles at various levels and organizations throughout the Department of Defense. Vast changes in the role of the PA, and in the opportunities for PA development, necessitated a dedicated resource; hence the initiation of a handbook to guide PAs: the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*.

The Borden Institute published the first edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook* in May 2018. The first edition originated from the need to understand the diverse positions and roles of the Army PA and prescribed PA-specific guidance for career development. This second edition of the handbook continues the legacy of the first edition in providing information on career development, current opportunities, and important lessons learned. The second edition also incorporates new roles and topics of interest that have emerged since 2015. It has been a “labor of love” to showcase PA foundations and recognize the advancements of the PA profession. This handbook serves as a chronological time capsule; a portrait in space and time. It depicts a thriving Army PA, a ready medical force multiplier who stands prepared to answer the call, whenever and where ever the nation has a need.

A literary work such as this handbook is no small feat. It requires extraordinary effort on the part of a dedicated and faithful team of collaborators. We are sincerely grateful for the contributions of so many of our colleagues and leaders in support of the second edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*.

This handbook exists due to the support of the Borden Institute staff, namely Mr. Ed Lindeke (Director), Ms. Joan Redding (Senior Production Editor), Dr. Lisa O'Brien (Editor), Mr. Robert Dredden (Illustrator), and Mr. Ernest Barner (Public Affairs). We are forever indebted to them for their coaching and guidance in the arduous process of charting the path to produce the PA Handbook.

The PA Handbook working group was instrumental in ushering the completion of this project. We would like to thank COL Johnny Paul and MAJ Paul (Jason) Auchincloss for performing first draft chapter reviews, and MAJ Timothy Pekari and CPT Robert Gipson for their administrative support. This endeavor was made possible due to their devotion and commitment.

To the numerous contributing authors who dedicated their time and energy in sharing their knowledge and experience, we wholeheartedly thank you. These authors took precious time to capture and portray their expertise to ensure that others may benefit from their lessons learned and tips for success.

To the military and civilian leaders, thank you for your mentorship and confidence in PAs. Your trust and faith have enabled us to contribute to a medically ready force and a ready medical force. Army Medicine is Army Strong!

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