

# You've Decided to Hire a Physician Assistant. Now What?

Part III in a series highlights how to attract, hire, and maintain a physician assistant in your dermatology practice

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In Parts I and II of this series we discussed evaluating the need for a physician assistant, PA reimbursement, PA education, and the differences in hiring a new graduate or an experienced dermatology PA. This third and final part of the series will address PA compensation, how to hire a PA and introduce them to your practice and community, and ideas for maintaining a positive working relationship.

## COMPENSATION

PA compensation, like that for dermatologists, varies from practice to practice, from region to region, and the experience level of the PA. A typical starting salary for a PA who is new to dermatology and will require several months of training before starting to generate any revenue might be in the \$60,000 - \$80,000 range. For a PA with significant dermatology experience who will be seeing patients on their own and generating revenue immediately, the starting base salary might be in the range of \$75,000 to \$150,000 or higher, again depending largely on the region of the country. The type of work the PA will be doing will also make a difference in compensation. PAs that help with Mohs surgery will often be compensated based on the amount of work they do with the surgeon. Most compensation packages include typical benefits and a productivity incentive bonus based on collections. Generally speaking, PAs nationwide will take home roughly 30-35 percent of their collections, which includes their salary and productivity bonus. These items are, of course, completely negotiable.

## ADVERTISING A POSITION

Now that you have determined you want to hire a PA for your practice, how do you advertise the position to attract

candidates? The best place to start is on the SDPA website's job posting board. Clearly, taking time to ensure that your job posting accurately reflects your position and conditions will ensure that you attract candidates that are best suited for the job and will likely lead to a shorter hiring process. Key things to include in the advertisement are: whether you are willing to consider candidates without dermatology experience and what type of practice setting you anticipate them working in—general adult medical dermatology, a mix of adult and pediatrics; if they will have the opportunity to do surgery and/or cosmetics, etc.

If you are particularly looking for a PA with dermatology experience, your local drug reps can be excellent resources. They will likely know the PAs practicing in your area and are often excellent judges of which PAs would be good fits with the personalities of the physicians in your practice.

## EVALUATING CANDIDATES

Once you receive CVs from interested candidates, how do you evaluate the candidates and decide who to hire?

Your office manager can be very helpful by collecting CVs from potential candidates and explaining the details of the position, such as full or part-time, Mohs, cosmetic, etc. This is a very efficient way to initially assess the applicants and to determine if they are still interested.

Once interested candidates have been identified, a reasonable approach would be to schedule dinner with the candidate or interview with them in the evening, outside of normal office hours. It is important that the PA and the supervising physician get along well on a personal level, so this type of interview, in a more relaxed setting and without

the pressure to get back to seeing patients, can be much more effective in assessing personal compatibility.

Once you've determined that you and the candidate fit well together personally, it is a good idea to ask them to come to the office and see patients with you for at least a day. This allows them to get a feel for the practice and decide if it is a place they would fit in well; and, it gives you a chance to see how they interact with your staff and patients.

### BRINGING A PA ON-BOARD

After an offer has been extended and accepted, an important consideration that may impact the PA's relationship with the practice from the start is how you bring them on-board. Probably the best place to start is by having a staff meeting with your current employees to let them know. Assuming this is the first PA your practice has hired, your staff will likely have numerous questions about the PA: what role they will play in the practice, who will be their support staff, how it will affect the rest of the staff, etc.

The other key group to consider is your patients. The first step is to order a pamphlet from the SDPA, entitled "What is a Dermatology Physician Assistant?" These can be placed in your waiting room or given to patients by the receptionist when they sign in. Also, as you identify patients who you are going to have follow-up with the PA, either you or your nurse should explain briefly to the patient that they will be seeing the PA at their follow-up visit and should reassure the patient that the PA is highly qualified and that you have worked closely with them and have complete confidence in them. If a new patient is being scheduled over the telephone, it may be helpful to send the dermatology PA pamphlet with the new patient paperwork.

Role playing with the staff to address questions that patients may ask when being scheduled on the PA's schedule can be beneficial. As your community and practice become more aware of the function of a PA, questions about the PA will become much less frequent. Many communities have been well aware of PAs for decades and are not likely to require the same sorts of introductions.

### A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

You've hired the PA, he or she is seeing patients, and everything is going great. What now?

First, plan to meet with your PA several times a year (or more often depending on the experience level of the PA) to discuss how things are going. Is there anything you'd like them to do differently? Anything you think they are doing wonderfully and should be commended for? Is there any-

thing they have concerns about? Anything they'd like to change? Any new services or procedures they'd like to start offering? Are they meeting their productivity goals? (Are you showing them their productivity numbers on a regular basis?) Do they need more support staff or rooms so that they can see more patients?

Second, make sure your PA is a fellow member of the Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants ([www.dermopa.org](http://www.dermopa.org)). The organization's goal is to educate dermatology physician assistants in order to enhance overall patient care. They organize two quality CME conferences a year with expert lecturers. As a board certified/board eligible dermatologist supervising a dermatology PA of the SDPA, you are also eligible to have a complimentary membership to the organization and receive journals and newsletters to stay up-to-date. Also, if your PA has been working with you for one year, then he/she is encouraged to pursue Diplomate Status by completing the Distance Learning Initiative (DLI) of the SDPA. As in all endeavors, the more education your PA has, the better he or she will be at their job, which, in turn, will benefit both your practice and your patients.

Third, be ready to consider hiring your next PA. Most practices that hire a PA find patients are extremely satisfied seeing the PA. But, before you do, make sure your current PA's schedule is full. By hiring another PA too early, you may run the risk of lessening the schedule of your first PA, ultimately cutting into their productivity.

### HAVE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Hopefully, the three parts to this series will help you have a positive experience in the process of hiring and maintaining a dermatology PA. The PA-MD team can be a great addition to any dermatology practice ensuring the best care for the patients. ■

*Previous installments are available at [PracticalDermatology.com](http://PracticalDermatology.com).*

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