**Nurse Practitioners and Physician’s Assistants: What’s the difference?**

*Short answer? Not much.* Both nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician’s assistants (PAs) are considered to be ‘mid-level providers.’ They can diagnose conditions and prescribe medications in a variety of settings including clinics and hospitals (regulation of these positions can differ by state and individual healthcare systems often prefer one over the other). Salaries and work responsibilities are comparable within specialties and both require a master’s level education (though NPs do have the option of earning a doctorate in nursing or DNP). NPs also have the opportunity to practice independently in a number of states; PAs must always work under a MD/DO.

**Where did these jobs come from?**

**Nurse Practitioner:** created so that experienced registered nurses could provide advanced care to underserved populations

**Physician’s Assistant:** designed to support combat medics with extensive medical training returning from Vietnam

Where NPs and PAs differ is in their education. NP training places an emphasis on disease adaptation, health promotion, wellness and prevention whereas PA education stresses general assessment, diagnosis and treatment. NPs must earn their RN first (graduate entry programs include this training) and may be required to work and gain experience, at least part-time, as a nurse; this increases the overall length of the program but can also enhance training and provide a funding source for the rest of the program through wages and/or tuition waivers . Furthermore, NPs receive both general training as well as training and certification by broad specialty (e.g. family medicine, pediatrics, acute care, etc.) and must complete additional clinicals and exams to change within broad specialties; PAs get a general education and do not need additional certification to change specialty. Both can gain experience and work within a narrower specialty (e.g. neurology, oncology) without additional education/certification. See below for general pre-requisites (varies by program).

**Education**

**Physician’s Assistant**

**2 -3 year post-BA/BS**

Common Pre-Requisite Courses

Bio 1113

Chem 1210, 1220, 2510 & 2540

Biochem 4511

Microbio 4000 or 4100

Anatomy 2300 or 3300

Physiology 3200

Psych 1100

HTHRHSC 2500

**Nurse Practitioner**

**3-4 year post- BA/BS**

Common Pre-Requisite Courses

Anatomy 2300 or 3300

Physiology 2520 or 3200

Pharm 4400, Pharmacology 5600 or Nur 2470

Microbio 4000 or 4100

Human Nutrition 2310

Nursing Assistant/STNA Course

**Frequently Asked Questions**

***Why would I choose to be a ‘mid-level provider’ when I can go to medical school?***

People decide against medical school for a variety of reasons. Some are not interested in accruing the large amounts of debt typical of MD/DO schools. Others do not want to make the enormous time commitment that medical schools and residencies typically require due to family plans/obligations, personal health concerns, etc. Others prefer the philosophy or style of these programs over that of MD/DO. The only ‘bad’ reason is being rejected from medical school and using NP/PA programs as a back-up, though this is occasionally a reason some apply.

***Do I need to be a registered nurse (RN) to apply to NP programs?***

No, many schools have ‘graduate entry’ programs for people with non-nursing bachelor’s degrees. People in these programs become RNs along the way.

***Do I need to take some sort of exam to apply to a PA or NP program?***

Many (but not all) programs require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) General Test.

***What GPA do I need?***

This requirement varies by school but it is safe to assume that a minimum 3.0 GPA and B’s or better in pre-requisite courses is preferred.

***How do I make myself a competitive applicant?***

Shadowing and volunteer experience are very important for both types of programs. Most schools also require patient care hours which may be gained though volunteering or working in a medical setting, (e.g. EMT, nursing assistant, etc.). Nursing assistant jobs are relatively easy to come by and offer extensive exposure to a variety of conditions, medications, and care providers. Working as an EMT would also be an excellent way to get this experience in a critical care environment, but jobs in larger cities (like Columbus) are difficult to get unless you are licensed as a paramedic. However, if you are from a small town or are willing to commute, you may be able to get an EMT job.

***How do I determine if NP or PA a better fit for me?***

Do some research into the philosophies of some different programs and shadow a variety of providers. Talking to people in both career paths will give you some insight into which one suits your interests. It may be that either one would work in which case you may want to focus more on program specialties, financial considerations, school locations, and other commitments.

***Does OSU have a \_\_\_\_ program?***

OSU has an established graduate entry nurse NP program and has plans to create a PA program in the future.