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## Introduction:

Physician assistants (PA) work in the medical field to help improve wait times, patient satisfaction, physician quality of life and to allow the physician to focus on complicated cases without sacrificing the care of other patients.

- PAs work alongside physicians to attain these goals and help solve the current shortage of physicians. (1)
- The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) introduced the position in 1984 and PAs were adopted into the civilian work force by Manitoba in 2003.

Research supporting the utilization of PAs in Manitoba is **limited** resulting in few if any published papers on this topic, however the profession is continually growing within Manitoba and across Canada. (3)

- Questioning those PA's and original supervising physicians is important in determining the current utilization of PA's in Manitoba.

**1999:** Legislation in Manitoba is passed regulating PAs and identifying the profession and "Clinical Assistants – Certified".

**2003:** The first civilian licensed PA in Canada begins practicing in Manitoba's Cardiac Sciences Ward at St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba .

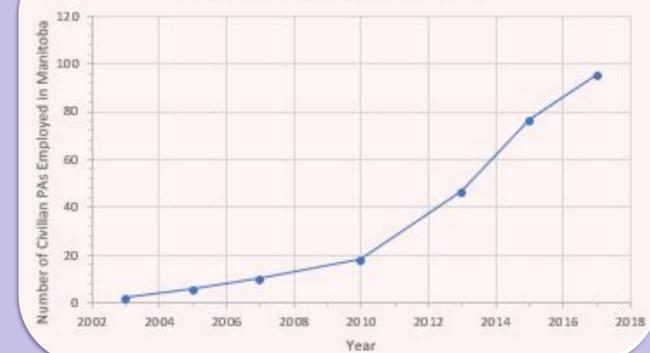
**2008:** Physician Assistant Education programs begin at the University of Manitoba.

**2009:** "Physician Assistant" became an official title in Manitoba

**2010:** The first students from the University of Manitoba PA education program graduate.

**2018:** 98 PAs are employed in Manitoba, and are currently found on 32-medical specialties across the province. (4)

Figure 5: Time line of the number of civilian PAs employed within the Manitoba workforce over the last 14 years.



**Improvement of the Medical Team:** PAs lessen the workload for the physicians and improve quality of life for patients and physicians alike. PAs are considered an integral part of the healthcare system. "...I firmly believe we are but one integral part of the healthcare system. Our success as a profession will be contingent on how we integrate" (PA, ACQ06)



Figure 1

## Conclusion:

PAs help improve access to care, patient satisfaction, and the quality of life of both patients and physicians. (2)

PAs are highly knowledgeable and trained as generalists across multiple specialties

The professionalism exuded by PAs in Manitoba is something that exists throughout the entire country.

The PA profession and increased significantly since the first civilian PA began working in Manitoba in 2003.

The utilization has changed and will continue to grow opening new doors for those entering the profession in the future, allowing PAs to grow, learn and adapt to help better the medical system in Manitoba and across the country.

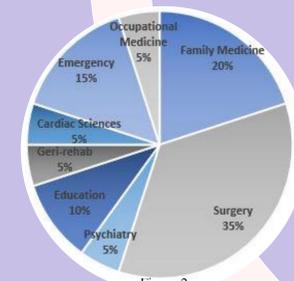


Figure 2



Figure 3

**PAs Are Being Underutilized in Manitoba:** Some PAs are being utilized to the fullest in that placement however across the province the utilization of PAs can be improved. "New PA grads are not being utilized to their full potential....They need time, training and experience in their roles for this to happen. It is a 5 year process...Same as residency is.... AND the reality is any help is better than no help." (PA, ACQ26)



Figure 4

**PAs Potentially Can Greatly Impact the Future if Utilized Properly:** A strong theme emerged within the data of the future use of PAs. Many interviewees believed rural primary care will make the largest impact. Others believed the largest impact would be wherever physician shortages occur. This question was interpreted many different ways making it difficult to quantify a consensus. "[PAs] could be a huge asset in Primary Care (urban and rural) to make enrollment of the population possible without expanding physician manpower. This is essential for prevention and management of chronic diseases and increasingly large frail/elderly population." (Dr. Luis Oppenheimer)

## Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to determine the evolution of PAs since their introduction to the medical industry and whether PAs are being utilized to their full extent. This was accomplished through a questionnaire and interviews with 7 physicians and 39 PAs.

**PA Utilization is Discipline Dependent:** Utilization is dependent on the location and responsibilities of the given position. PAs currently work in a wide range of disciplines including surgery, family medicine, emergency, psychiatry, geriatrics, urology, and cardiac sciences. "I have to be able to manage all emergency cases which includes all aspects of the provision of care i.e. IV starts/meds, procedures etc., this also included that procurement and dispensing of medications up to and including narcotics." (PA, ACQ46)

## Methods:

- This was a mixed methodology qualitative research project with a questionnaire of opened ended questions and commentary provided to 46 individuals. This study was conducted to document and explore the utilization of PAs over the last 15 years, by gathering perspectives and using experiences to provide first-person evaluations.
- 7 physicians and 39 PAs were contacted via email regarding their views on PAs and whether they are being used effectively in the work force from their introduction to the present. Between 2003 and 2010 Manitoba had less than 25 working PAs some who are no longer reachable, resulting in a small sample size.
- Each response was given a code starting with "ACQ" and ending with a randomized number. For privacy protection all names have been removed from the results shown. References will be cited as the profession interviewed followed by the corresponding ACQ code.

## Discussion:

- Data on the utilization of PAs in Manitoba is severely limited despite the call for research into PAs within Manitoba in 2010. (5)
- Arguably the lack of research is due to the fact that physicians and medical personnel are highly content with the roles that PAs play and do not recognize the need for further research. (5)
- Research is required in order to show the medical profession as a whole that PAs have a significant impact on the medical system.
- Manitoba has not reached its full potential for the utilization of PAs.
- As shown through the questionnaire, PAs are utilized well, however to improve and move forward, funding and the education of other professions on the abilities of a PA are required.

## Limitations:

Areas that could be improved moving forward with this study and future research include:

- Increasing the sample size of physicians that work with PAs, by including those with experience between 2003 and 2013.
- Including the military PAs that have been in the civilian workforce up to 2013 to increase the sample size.
- Clarification of the question "where do PAs provide the most impact?" due to the multiple interpretations it was difficult to condense the responses and come to a conclusion.

## References:

- Figure 1: Retrieved from PowerPoint Online Pictures, <https://graphicriver.net/item/medical-team/19469474>
- Figure 2: Time line of the number of civilian PAs employed within the Manitoba workforce over the last 14 years.
- Figure 3: Retrieved from PowerPoint Online Pictures, <http://cdn.sheknows.com/articles/2011/07/bored-woman-waiting-for-end-of-work-day.jpg>
- Figure 4: Retrieved from PowerPoint Online Pictures, <https://coreybradshaw.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/the-future.jpg>

## References:

- (1) Jones IW, Hooker RS. Physician Assistants in Canada Update on health policy initiatives. *Can Fam Physician*. 2011;57:83-8.
- (2) Bowen S, Botting I, Huebner L, Wright B, Beaupre B, Permack S, et al. Potential of physician assistants to support primary care Recherche Contribution potentielle des assistants médicaux aux soins de première ligne. *Can Fam Physician*. 2016;62:268-77.
- (3) Mertens J, Descoteaux M. The evolution of PAs in the Canadian Armed Forces. *J Am Acad Physician Assist*. 2017;30(1).
- (4) Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. Historical Timeline [Internet]. 2017. 2018 [cited 2018 May 5]. Available from: <https://capa-acam.ca/historical-timeline/>
- (5) Jones I 2018, oral communication, April 22nd

