

# PA Shadowing Experience at LVHN and Potential Effects on Future Career Choices

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# PA Shadowing Experience at LVHN and Potential Effects on Future Career Choices

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## INTRODUCTION

- Physician Assistant (PA) program requirements vary depending on the program, but most have a large focus on healthcare experience hours. The minimum hours range from 5,000 (1% of PA schools) to none (8%) with most falling around 500 hours (49%).<sup>1</sup>
- Experience demonstrates medical competency and ability to perform in the healthcare setting.
- The purpose of my role was to gain healthcare experience and determine if it was helpful in furthering my education and choosing a career path.

## METHODS



- I had set days to shadow PAs in different specialties throughout Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN).
- At the times I was not shadowing, I worked on a literature review of the PA career, PA school admissions, the role of shadowing on career choices of healthcare professionals, and the reasoning behind the healthcare experience hours required to attend to PA school.
- I used research studies, university websites, and national/international PA organizations to compile information about shadowing hours that I used to compare to my own experiences here at LVHN.

## RESULTS

Table 1. Average Health Care Experience Hours of Matriculating Students<sup>2</sup>

	Number (programs)	Mean	SD	Mdn
Patient Contact	80	3,089.1	3,061.329	2,458.0
Other Health Experience	26	1,083.6	1,497.52	331.0
Other Work Experience	16	3,560.4	4,063.74	2,750.0
Community Service	27	359.9	336.12	251.0
Shadowing	35	167.7	284.08	100.0
Research	18	755.6	724.53	688.0
Total	85	4,252.4	5,582.24	2,662.0

- Extensive research of PA program admission data showed that healthcare experience hours are among the most important criteria for admission along with GPA and interview score.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- I logged 162 hours shadowing PAs within the network, putting me nearly equal with the mean shadowing hours of matriculating PA students from the 29th Annual Report by the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA).<sup>2</sup>
- The professionals I shadowed dispensed great knowledge to me about the scope of each of their specialties, as well as outstanding, invaluable advice on the road to becoming a PA from where I am in my education.
- The literature I have reviewed shows clear evidence that early experience in healthcare has been shown to make learning more relevant and real, helps students to socialize within the profession, and benefits the patients.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

- This experience has opened my eyes to many different specialties within the PA career scope.
- Spending time on the job with PAs gave exemplary learning experience that no class or textbook could teach.
- After logging over 160 shadowing hours with PAs in different specialties, I have further solidified my decision to pursue a future as a Physician Assistant.
- Going into the program, my main interest was Emergency Medicine; however, after spending time in over 30 surgical cases, I have begun to strongly consider surgery as a career option.
- Following my literature review and the comparison with my own experience, I have concluded that the healthcare hour requirements are extremely helpful in learning about medicine in the workplace setting to supplement textbook and class time. It gives students a chance to see if the profession they are pursuing is a good fit for them.
- The future will tell for certain what the effects of my shadowing experience here has on my career choice, or if salary, location, and hours will play a greater role in the selection process.

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