The Future of Physician Assistants in Rural Canada
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Presentation Objectives
• The role of the Physician Assistant (PAs) and how they can benefit rural and remote settings
• PA Education and Scope of Practice
• Challenges to integrating PAs into rural and remote settings
• The positive impact of the PA profession on the health care system
• Physician Assistants – A Canadian Forces Perspective

My workplace - EKATI

What is a PA?
• A Physician Assistant is a health care provider who extends the hand of the supervising physician
• They are trained under the medical model
• They were developed within the Canadian Forces to provide full spectrum medical care as part of a physician-led team

What is a PA?
• The PA is not intended to supplant or substitute the physician as the principal medical decision-maker
• The activities of the PA are at all times subject to:
  – The direction of the supervising physician
  – Relevant government legislation and regulation
  – The policies of the PA’s employer

Scope of Practice
• PAs in Canada have been formally trained and educated to meet the national standard set by the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA)
• The National Competency Profile and Scope of Practice was developed in conjunction with the CFPC, CMA, and RCPSC
• The Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada (PACCC) administers and maintains the national PA certification process
**What Can a PA Do?**

- Physical assessments
- Diagnostic tests
- Diagnosing illnesses
- Formulating treatment plans
- Therapeutic interventions
- Health promotion
- Prescribing medications
- Research
- Education

**PAs: The American Experience**

- More than 60,000 practicing PAs in the United States
- PA-enabling legislation in all 50 states
- Authorized to prescribe in all 50 states
- Over 150 accredited PA Programs in the US

**PAs in Canada**

- The PA profession grew out of the Canadian Forces
- There are now upwards of 350 Physician Assistants practicing in Canada
- 4 provinces recognize PAs as a profession
  - Manitoba
  - Ontario
  - New Brunswick
  - Alberta

**CMA - PA Accredited Programs**

- Canadian Forces Health Services Training Centre
- University of Manitoba Physician Assistant Education Program
- McMaster University Medical Sciences PA Program
- Consortium for PA Education (combination of the University of Toronto/Northern Ontario School of Medicine/Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences)

**Academic Year** – (University of Manitoba)

- Emergency
- Surgery
- Infection
- Medicine
- Paediatrics
- Cardiac and Endocrinology
- Patient Assessment
- Diagnostic Imaging
- Adult Medicine
- Psychiatry

57 Credit Hours of Academics over 47 Weeks in 3 Semesters

**Clinical Year** (University of Manitoba)

- Family Medicine: 8 weeks
- Internal Medicine: 4 weeks
- Surgery: 4 weeks
- Orthopaedic & Sports Medicine: 4 weeks
- Paediatrics: 4 weeks
- Psychiatry: 4 weeks
- Emergency Medicine: 4 weeks
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology: 4 weeks
- Anaesthesia: 2 weeks
- Clinical Electives: 4 weeks
PAs in Canada - Where are we working?

- Emergency Medicine
- Orthopaedics
- Nephrology
- Family Medicine
- Occupational Medicine
- Oncology
- Cardiovascular services
- Psychiatry
- Neurosurgery
- ICU
- Urology
- General Surgery
- Plastic Surgery
- Education
- Geriatric Services
- Canadian Forces

Liability

- The supervising physician is covered by Canadian Medical Protective Association liability insurance plan when working with a PA
- Liability coverage can be obtained for Certified PAs through Canadian Association of Physician Assistants through Willis Canada Inc.

Why PAs?

- The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada notes that 31.4% (approximately 9 million) Canadians live in rural regions yet they are served only by approximately 11% of physicians

Benefits to the Health Care System

- A recent systematic review of 66 studies into the role and impact of PAs in the emergency department indicated that PAs are reliable in assessing certain medical complaints and performing procedures, and are well accepted by ED staff and patients alike. (Shaw, O., Baldovin, V., Klassen, Y., Shee, S. and Becker, L. (2012). A systematic review: The role and impact of the physician assistant in the emergency department. Emergency Medicine Australasia, 24, 7–15. doi: 10.1111/j.1742-7171.2011.01104.x)

The Value of PAs

- Integrating PAs into health care will increase the level of service for patients and address the challenges that exist within today’s health system
- Collaborative approach that reduces the workload placed on the team and the physician
- The PA profession is designed to work in a team-based setting which fosters inter-professional collaboration among other health care providers
Obstacles to Advancement
- Legislation / Regulation
- Lack of familiarity with the PA role and Scope of Practice
- Defining the role and PA / Physician relationship in a rural / remote settings
- Absence of a funding model(s)
- Recruitment and integration of PAs

Funding
- There is no universal funding model for PAs
- Funding for PAs varies depending on the setting and location
- Typically PAs are funded through the government or directly through the physician

Future of the Profession
- The benefits to the health system are proven
- It is essential to create a funding structure for physicians to employee PAs
- Must remove the other barriers to employment
- Need to educate stakeholders on the benefits of the profession

Future of the Profession
- PAs can support physicians in remote and rural areas in Canada
- The value that PAs bring to the health system is evidenced by:
  - Decreased wait times
  - Increased patient satisfaction
  - Improved physician productivity
- Without the support of local and provincial governments and other key health organizations the full potential of the profession will not be realized nationally

For more information
www.capa-acam.ca
**Personal Experience**

- Family physician
- 19 years experience in Canadian Forces
  - Regular supervision of physician assistants
  - Commanded Health Services in Kandahar 2011
  - Currently CF senior medical authority for BC
- Rural ER experiences ~700 hours/year
  - Goose Bay, Comox, Smiths Falls, all across Ontario
  - Lone provider ERs

**Historical Perspective**

- First graduating class 1984
- Curriculum reviewed and program expanded 2002
- Employed in all operational environments

**Regulatory Framework**

- CF PAs have an independent scope of practice defined by the Surgeon General
- Defined formulary with some limitations
- Senior physicians at each base/location responsible for oversight

**Continuing Professional Development Programs**

- Maintenance of Clinical Readiness Program
- CFPC MAINPRO Alignment
- Annual CPE funding allocation

**WHERE DO CF PAs WORK?**

*On the ground...*

*On and under the water...*
PA Employment in the CF

- Isolated
  - Submarines
  - Canadian Forces Station Alert
  - Aeromedical evacuation
- Austere
  - Afghanistan
  - Libya
  - Disaster response

PA Employment in the CF

- In-garrison
  - Family medicine
  - Public health & preventive medicine
  - Immunizations
  - Lead non-commissioned members in the clinic
- Dive and flight medicine on-call

Utilization of PAs in the Canadian Health Care System

- Rural extenders
- High volume ERs
- High volume family practice
- Specialty clinics
- Hospitalists

These represent my personal views and not that of the Canadian Forces or Government of Canada

Benefits of PAs to the Rural ER

1. Assist with volume issues
2. Deal with mundane or time intensive patients
3. Provide a check and balance in lone provider settings
4. Leadership and organizational abilities (CF PAs)
5. Extra skilled hands during the daily crises
6. Strength in collaboration

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP
War Stories

Dismounted Complex Blast Injury

???QUESTIONS???

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