

HEALTH AWARENESS BENEFITS

PUTNAM COUNTY HOSPITAL

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The Changing Face of Primary Care



Having a difficult time finding a primary care physician (PCP)? You are not alone. We are facing a shortage of PCPs across the country. But, there are alternatives to primary care physicians: physician assistants, nurse practitioners and hospitalists.



	PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT (PA)	NURSE PRACTITIONER (NP)	HOSPITALIST
WHAT IT IS	A licensed clinician who has completed at least a two-year accredited program and practices under the supervision of a physician. PAs are not required to complete internships or residencies; many focus their studies on primary care medicine.	A registered nurse who has also completed graduate-level medical education. For most, this means getting a master's degree, but more and more NPs are advancing to a Doctor of Nursing Practice, which can take two to four more years of study.	A physician who manages a patient's care in the hospital until he or she has been discharged. Most hospitalists have a Doctor of Medicine or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree; the majority are trained in internal medicine and/or pediatrics.
THE REASON	The PA role began in the mid 1960s in response to a shortage of PCPs in underserved and rural areas. One doctor's office can employ several physician assistants to act as principal care providers, per the guidance of the supervising physician.	Like PAs, nurse practitioners helped fill the PCP shortage in the mid-60s. NPs can function as primary care providers without the supervision of a PCP.	A hospitalist makes it unnecessary for a PCP to visit hospitalized patients. This patient will have an in-house person to oversee the care he or she receives from nurses, surgeons and specialists.
THE BENEFIT	Physician assistants are often available for appointments when physicians are not. They can conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive care, write prescriptions and assist in surgery.	Studies have found that NPs can provide care that matches and at times improves on that of doctors while still being cost-effective. NPs emphasize prevention and spend an average of 21 minutes with a patient, longer than a typical doctor visit.	Hospitalists are available around the clock and are intimately familiar with the hospital environment. This can translate to a reduction in length of stay- and expense- by an average of 15 percent.
WHERE TO FIND ONE	At a doctor's office: About 35 percent of PAs work in primary care, the rest work in medical and surgical specialties, according to the American Academy of Physician Assistants. There are almost 74,000 PAs today, compared with 240 in 1970.	At a hospital or doctor's office: NPs may work independently or in collaboration with a physician, depending on state regulations. The field is rapidly growing. There are more than 125,000 NPs today. The first NP program was established in 1965.	At a hospital: Once you have checked into a hospital, a hospitalist may be assigned to you. Hospitalists monitor and coordinate all aspects of your care.

Adapted from O Magazine, original article written by Lauren Dzubow

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health-care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above, consult a health-care provider.

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