

Practical skills workshops for physician associates: the final piece of the workforce puzzle?

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Introduction

Though physician associates (PAs) have been working in the NHS for over 10 years, for some they are still relatively new and their position possibly not yet fully defined in the current workforce. However, they are becoming an integral part of the modern NHS and vital in a changing landscape with ever-increasing pressures and challenges. And thus, with the likelihood that pre-defined processes, roles and responsibilities may evolve. And while acquiring competencies in common bedside practical skills, such as cannulation and arterial blood gas (ABG) sampling are essential, the ability to ably assist or perform lumbar punctures, ascitic and pleural aspirations may be of increasing importance. At Darent Valley Hospital we have designed and will be delivering a series of workshops to train PAs and plan to assess (both qualitatively and quantitatively) exposure, experience and confidence of PAs prior and post these workshops.

Methods

A series of workshops have been organised for around 50 qualified PAs and PA students to teach five common practical skills in secondary care: cannulation, ABG sampling, lumbar puncture, ascitic and pleural aspiration. Teaching will be delivered in an integrative mixed method design to small groups catering to different learning styles in which candidates will practice and demonstrate the procedures on mannequins/models. They will then be assessed with direct observed procedure feedback and debriefed. Attendees will be asked to complete a pre- and post-course questionnaire on previous exposure, experience and confidence in these skills.

Results and conclusion

Darent Valley Hospital will be holding 3–4 workshops from February to April 2022 involving a mixture of PA and PA students. This is possibly the first bespoke workshop for PAs in the UK and we would like to present our experience and evidence of PA training needs, competencies, perception and expectations. ■

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