

Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations for the Bachelor of Physician Assistant (BScPA) Temerty Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

Introduction

The Physician Assistant Program has implemented degree level expectations as outlined in the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) Guidelines. The following details how these expectations are met for students attaining the degree requirements.

Depth and Breadth of Knowledge

Students develop a depth and breadth of knowledge and critical understanding of the key concepts, methodologies, current advancements, theoretical approaches, and assumptions in physician assistant studies. The first year of the program has been designed to begin with the basic medical sciences, providing the foundational knowledge from which to build upon. Knowledge is then acquired in more advanced courses such as pathology and pharmacology, building on previous concepts. The first two semesters also include problem-based learning and clinical case-based teaching to tie concepts together.

Knowledge of Methodologies

Throughout the program, students acquire the practical knowledge necessary to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems, using well established ideas and techniques. The final semester in Year 1 provides an in-depth, system-by-system approach to patient diagnosis and treatment, weaving all learnings from the first three semesters together. This includes well-child visits, periodic health exams and comprehensive geriatric care. Key assessments of skills that students will need for all clinical rotations are integrated throughout the first year. The second year of the program focuses primarily on clinical education, with a total of 44 placement weeks at sites in both Northern and Southern Ontario. A 6-week rotation in primary care is purposefully scheduled first, providing the foundation of a generalist approach to medicine. After their first primary care experience, students continue in their subsequent 5 core clinical rotations, finishing with 3 clinical electives. A second 6-week primary care rotation is also required by the end of the clinical year. All placements are one month in duration, except for the two six-week primary care rotations.

Application of Knowledge

The application of knowledge is scaffolded throughout the BScPA program and students demonstrate the acquisition of this knowledge in a variety of settings. During the first Campus Block in year one, students interact with peers and Standardized Patients (SPs) (while guided by facilitators), to learn and demonstrate their clinical skills (history taking and physical exams). In the final Campus Block of year one, students practice procedural techniques such as advanced suturing, phlebotomy and specimen collection, urinary catheterization, and wound care – the common procedural skills they will need in clinical practice. The hands-on clinical experiences are strategically embedded throughout the program.

Communication Skills

Students engage in various learning opportunities to gain and develop the ability to communicate accurately and reliably to a range of audiences. The program ensures students develop their written communication skills by writing reflective and opinion essays. In the Longitudinal Clinical Experience course, students practice history and physical examinations, learn how to gather information and proper medical documentation, build critical thinking and differential diagnosis skills, and culminate the ability to communicate patient cases efficiently and effectively in an oral case presentation.

Awareness of Limits of Knowledge

Students learn to recognize and accept the limitations in their knowledge and clinical skills, and how this might influence their analyses and interpretations. They demonstrate a commitment to continuously improve their abilities, skills, knowledge, judgement, and leadership. As a future regulated health care professional, students are encouraged to continuously improve and to strive for excellence in all aspects of their practice.

Autonomy and Professional Capacity

Students gain the qualities and transferrable skills necessary to participate effectively in health care organizations and on health care teams. As part of the course, students must complete a reflection essay, giving them the opportunity to describe themselves as emerging PAs, why they decided to pursue this career, how their past experiences in education and work are significant, what makes them unique or special, and what their professional goals are.

The Student Handbook includes professional expectations of PA learners while in the program. Students are expected to always abide by the student code of conduct. The PA Code of Ethics is recited at the Welcome Ceremony and is reflective of clinical practice expectations. Students of the program must appreciate the diverse educational cultural, and social backgrounds of peers, patients, and others in order to effectively interact and work collaboratively.