

Research Priorities for the
NCCPA Foundation Call for Research Grant Proposals
Deadline: October 15, 2011

The NCCPA Foundation's Research Grants Program supports research regarding the training, practice, employment, assessment and/or certification of physician assistants. The Foundation welcomes applications for grants of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for projects conducted within a single institution or up to \$25,000 for collaborative projects. Projects must address priorities of the grant program. Funding will cover *direct costs only*.

The Foundation will consider applications that include a proposal completed in accordance with the requirements described in the *Research Grants Program Application Process and Requirements* document provided with this call for proposals. Funding is contingent upon an executed *NCCPA Foundation Research Grant Agreement*, which is also included with the application process and requirements document.

The deadline for submitting proposals is ***October 15, 2011***.

Research Priorities

Proposals that address these topics will receive priority consideration for funding.

1. Outcomes in the Use of Simulation in PA Programs

For several years, the Foundation's annual call for proposals has included as a research priority the use of standardized patients in PA programs. This year the topic has been expanded to include additional forms of simulation in education and assessment. Our interest in the use of simulation relates to the opportunities it creates to assess many PA competencies (such as interpersonal and communications skills, physical exam skills, and procedural skills) that cannot be fully assessed by the current multiple-choice format of NCCPA's certifying or recertifying exams. Hands-on simulation helps teams and individuals develop preparedness and insight that is best learned and practiced in realistic conditions. This often translates into improved real-world communication, collaboration, teamwork, and crisis management.

The NCCPA Foundation has previously funded four research projects related to the use of standardized patients in PA programs:

- "An Update on the Utilization of Standardized Patients in Physician Assistant Education," authored by Coplan, Essary, Loheny and Stoehr and published in the *Journal of Physician Assistant Education* (2008, Vol. 18 No. 4)
- "Using the Angoff Method to Set Defensible Cut off Scores for Standardized Patient Performance Evaluations in PA Education," authored by Carlson, Tomkowiak and Stilp and published in the *Journal of Physician Assistant Education* (2009, Vol. 20 No. 1)
- "Standardization of the Clinical Skills Evaluation of PA Students across Multiple PA Programs" (not yet published)

- “Incorporation of ‘Reflection-in-Action’ in the PA Student Standardized Patient-Based Performance Exam: Could this Improve PA Student Competency?” (not yet published)

A review of the two published studies will provide information on what has been done to date and may help identify potential research questions. They can be accessed online at www.paexcellence.org.

2. PA Workforce and Practice Issues

The PA profession must continually understand our current and potential roles in the evolving US health care system. Along these lines, NCCPA is interested in the value that certified PAs add in their respective practices as well as potential contributions in emerging roles such as the hospitalist.

Specific questions of interest include:

1. How do PAs contribute to the delivery of cost-effective care?
2. What is the impact of PAs on patient safety?
3. What is the impact of PAs on access to care?
4. What is the impact of PAs beyond direct patient care?
5. What is the impact of PAs on patient satisfaction?
6. How prepared is the PA workforce to care for a diverse population?
7. What are the factors influencing PA career paths in primary care?

3. PA Competencies: Development and Assessment

NCCPA continues to be interested in further defining entry, intermediate, and advanced levels of PA competencies and approaches for assessing achievement of those levels.

Specific questions of interest include:

1. What level of competency is expected or required of entry level PAs and PAs with different levels of experience?
2. How do expectations or requirements differ among specialties or practice settings?
3. How should the competencies be evaluated over time within the evolving practice environment?
4. How can graduate PAs self-assess with respect to the competencies and use this information to develop and modify a life-long learning plan?
5. What CME choices are PAs making now and what is the relationship of these choices to their current practice? How do PAs’ CME choices compare to their 20 most common diagnoses?
6. What are practicing PAs’ activities in the competency categories of “practice-based learning and improvement” and “system-based practice”?

The NCCPA Foundation has funded several projects related to PA competencies. One project related to incorporating the PA competencies into PA education and was published in *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education* and is also posted on the NCCPA Foundation’s Web site at <http://www.paexcellence.org>.

4. Interprofessional Education

“Interprofessional education involves educators and learners from two or more health professions and their foundational disciplines who jointly create and foster a collaborative learning environment. The goal of these efforts is to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that result in interprofessional team behaviors, competence and improvement of patient care.” (the Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education (CAIPE)).

There continues to be debate about the effectiveness of interprofessional education. Studies are needed that document the models of interprofessional learning and the impact of such education on attitudes, practice patterns and the quality of patient care.

5. Oral Health Care and Physician Assistants

The first Surgeon General’s report on oral health was released in 2000 and identified a “silent epidemic” of oral diseases that burden some high-risk groups. That report called for a national effort to improve oral health care and overall health. The Surgeon General also called for a national partnership to provide opportunities for individuals, communities, and the health professions to work together to maintain and improve the nation’s oral health. Three recent articles have outlined where PAs seem to be both in oral health competencies and oral health curriculum.

1. Oral Health Competencies for Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners
[<http://www.paeaonline.org/index.php?ht=a/GetDocumentAction/i/25314>] by Danielsen, Dillenberg, & Bay in the *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*.
2. Oral Health Curricula in Physician Assistant Programs: A Survey of Physician Assistants Program Directors
[<http://www.paeaonline.org/index.php?ht=a/GetDocumentAction/i/110198>] by Jacques, et al, in the *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*.
3. Taking a Bite Out of Disparities: Oral Health in Primary Care in the November 2010 issue of *Clinician Reviews* by Ann Hoppel.
[<http://www.clinicianreviews.com/Article.aspx?ArticleId=jEC6dkw/R50=&FullText=1>]

A review of these three articles can provide information on what has been done to date and may help identify potential research questions.

The Society of Teachers of Family Medicine and the American Academy of Family Physicians released the third edition of the free and award-winning Smiles for Life: A National Oral Health Curriculum. This 7 module course covers the relationship of oral to systemic health, child oral health, adult oral health, dental emergencies, oral health in pregnancy, fluoride varnish, and the oral examination. This site can be viewed at www.smilesforlifeoralhealth.org. Research could be done on the use of the Smiles for Life curriculum and its impact on PA practice.

Possible Resource for Data

NCCPA is willing to work with researchers to provide data in support of research projects. All data provided must be within NCCPA’s information disclosure policy, and with the exception of

data that is public information, all data provided to researchers will be depersonalized. Examples of possible data available include length of certification, pass/fail rates on examinations, specialty areas of practice, CME courses logged, demographics (age, gender, region), etc. NCCPA's Research Policy is provided for review as part of the application document and is also available on the NCCPA Foundation's Web site at <http://www.paexcellence.org>.