



*Accreditation Review Commission on Education
for the Physician Assistant, Inc.*

**Clinical Postgraduate PA Programs
Accreditation Process
Revised July, 2009**

Clinical postgraduate PA programs are formal educational programs in a medical or surgical specialty that offer structured curricula, including didactic and clinical components, to educate graduates of an ARC-PA accredited entry level PA program who are National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) eligible or certified. Programs typically involve full time study of 12-24 months duration.

The clinical postgraduate PA program accreditation process conducted by the ARC-PA is a voluntary one entered into by institutions and programs that sponsor a structured educational experience. To be eligible to apply for accreditation, programs must be operational with at least one enrolled PA resident at the time of application.

Accreditation Process for Clinical Postgraduate PA Programs

Clinical postgraduate PA programs interested in applying for accreditation by the ARC-PA should review the ARC-PA web site (www.arc-pa.org) and contact the ARC-PA office expressing their interest in accreditation.

- Technical assistance is offered by ARC-PA staff for clinical postgraduate PA programs applying for accreditation. This periodic service will focus on assisting clinical postgraduate PA programs in understanding the process and application for accreditation.
- A critical component of the accreditation process is that of continuous clinical postgraduate program self-assessment. Continuous self-assessment is a comprehensive, regular, and analytical process conducted within the context of the mission and goals of both the sponsoring institution and the clinical postgraduate program whereby a clinical postgraduate program regularly and systematically reviews the quality and effectiveness of its educational practices and policies. During this process of ongoing self assessment, the clinical postgraduate program identifies strengths as well as problems, develops plans for corrective intervention, and evaluates the effects of the interventions. Ongoing self-assessment provides the means by which clinical postgraduate PA programs can envision, attain, and maintain quality education. The accreditation application includes questions that address issues related to a well conceived self-assessment process.
- Prior to administrative review of the application, each clinical postgraduate PA program must have its curriculum reviewed. The program must identify a panel of physicians and PAs to review its curriculum content and required clinical experiences. In some cases a physician specialty organization or may be used to review the curriculum. The ARC-PA must pre-approve the organization or panel members from which review of their curriculum will be solicited. As programs begin considering the members or their curriculum review panels, they should contact the ARC-PA Associate Director to discuss the process.

- Whether an organization or a panel is used to review the curriculum, one person must be identified by the program as the curriculum review coordinator. This person may be one of the curriculum reviewers, or may only serve in the role of coordinator, collecting and compiling the reviewers' feedback into one form to be returned to the program and ARC-PA. The coordinator must not be involved the operation of the applicant program.
- The program must provide the panel with specified materials about the program curriculum.
- Individually completed curriculum review forms should be submitted to the curriculum review coordinator and a composite of the reviews must be returned by the coordinator to the program and to the ARC-PA as directed on the form.
- Applications for initial accreditation will receive an administrative review for completeness. Site visits will be scheduled for programs whose applications are complete. If the application is incomplete the program will be asked to submit missing components prior to scheduling the site visit.
- Site visits for initial accreditation will be scheduled after clearing the administrative review of the application. Program applications and supporting documentation will be reviewed by two individuals selected from a pool of site visitors. Site visits will include one visitor on site for one day. Visit will require an entire day from 7:30 am to 5 pm and may require that the visitor actually stay over two nights for the visit, so as not to shorten the visit for travel reasons.
- The purpose of the site visit is to allow the site visit team to verify, validate, and clarify the information supplied by the program in its application. The site visit team also reviews the nature and manner in which the program's objectives are being pursued, and the manner in which the program's self-identified concerns and problems are being addressed. The team evaluates the program based on the accreditation Standards for clinical postgraduate PA programs and conveys its evaluation to the ARC-PA in light of the evidence presented at the time of the site visit. The team's observations about the program, in reference to the program's compliance with the Standards, are sent to the program shortly after the completion of the site visit.
- Within a specified period of time after the site visit, programs are invited, but not required, to respond to any of the observations contained in the site visit summary in order to eliminate errors of fact or challenge perceived ambiguities and misperceptions. The response is NOT to be used to provide new information regarding changes made since the visit or plans for changes in response to the observations contained in the report.
- Programs are reviewed by the full commission in March and September each year. Programs visited from October through January will be reviewed at the March meeting. Clinical postgraduate PA programs visited from April through August will be reviewed at the September meeting.
- Accreditation decisions are based on the ARC-PA's review of information contained in the accreditation application, the report of site visit evaluation teams, any additional requested reports or documents submitted to the ARC-PA by program, and the program's past accreditation history (if applicable). Additional data to clarify information submitted with the application may be requested at the time of the site visit. New unsolicited information

submitted after a site visit will not be accepted or considered by the ARC-PA as part of that accreditation review process.

- Accreditation for clinical postgraduate PA programs is time limited. Initial accreditation will be limited to three years. If the program chooses to continue its accreditation, it will complete a continuing application and will be eligible for three additional years of accreditation (3+3). There is no site visit associated with the second review. (A site visit could be scheduled if the review of documents submitted indicates that a visit is needed to verify, validate, or clarify information.)
- After a 6 year period of accreditation, another site visit will be a required component of the accreditation process for any clinical postgraduate PA program wanting to continue its accreditation.
- All accredited clinical postgraduate PA programs will be required to submit an annual report.