

Assumption University
School of Health Professions
PA Program

Program Required Competencies

Adopted from:
[PAEA Core Competencies for New PA Graduates](#)

1. Patient-Centered Practice Knowledge

Intended to help graduates understand that the patient is at the center of care, this domain emphasizes the essentials of medical knowledge in the context of the knowledge needed to care for *individual* patients.

Framing knowledge as needed for the practice of patient-centered care creates an orientation from which all medical knowledge should be considered — that is, based on the needs of the patient. Situating medical knowledge in this way has implications for the new graduate competencies, as well as curriculum and assessments.

A cursory reading of the new graduate competencies may cause some alarm for readers expecting to see a comprehensive list of all of the medical knowledge and clinical skills that have traditionally been listed in competency documents. However, no such list will be found in the Core Competencies for New PA Graduates, and there are at least three good reasons for this omission:

1. Medical knowledge alone is insufficient. It is not enough to know information for its own sake; rather, new graduates must deeply understand the core knowledge needed to care for patients and be able to apply it. With a solid foundation of the knowledge needed for patient care, new graduates will then be able to extend their knowledge through lifelong learning and the use of technology.
2. Not all medical knowledge is essential for patient care. PA curricula should focus on ensuring that new graduates possess and can apply the core knowledge needed to care for patients upon entry into clinical practice. Additional knowledge and skills will be gained as new graduates gain on-the-job experience.
3. Given the exponential growth in medical knowledge, it is no longer feasible for new graduates to know everything. According to Prober and Kahn, “It is neither possible nor desirable for all students to deeply explore all aspects of biomedical knowledge.”¹⁸ Therefore, PA program curricula should not try to cover as much content as possible. Rather, the scope should be narrowed to focus on the medical knowledge that is essential, thus allowing for deeper understanding of core knowledge that has practical application for better patient care.

Competent graduates will continually refine and revise their knowledge base to ensure they remain abreast of current scientific evidence and best practices in patient care. Demonstrating the ability to continually assess one’s level of medical knowledge and constantly strive to augment it is essential for lifelong learning and delivering quality, patient-centered care.

Graduates must demonstrate the ability to listen to and understand patients’ beliefs and attitudes toward health and health care. Competent graduates understand that their relationship with patients can be affected by differences in power, privilege, and the inequities embedded therein, and they work to ensure that patients are viewed as

partners in health. Competent practitioners must be able to develop the professional relationships with their patients that will ensure patient-focused decision-making.

The competent graduate will be able to access and integrate pertinent information from both the best scientific evidence and their clinical expertise, and apply it to the care of the patient in a way that respects the individual needs, desires, care preferences, and values of the patient. In this way, PAs use an evidence-based approach to shared medical decision-making. Developing not only critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills but also critical consciousness is essential for graduates.¹⁹

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to recognize healthy versus ill patients in the context of the patients' lives and determine the stage of illness — acute, at risk of illness (emerging), or chronic. Graduates will demonstrate the ability to utilize up-to-date scientific evidence to inform clinical reasoning and clinical judgment (PCSR 1.5).

Competencies

- 1.1 Recognize normal and abnormal health states
- 1.2 Discern among acute, chronic, and emerging disease states
- 1.3 Elicit and understand the stories of individual patients and apply the context of their lives (including environmental influences, cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, and beliefs) when determining healthy versus ill patients
- 1.4 Develop meaningful, therapeutic relationships with patients and their families (PA Comp. PC, FMM)
- 1.5 Partner with patients to address issues of ongoing signs, symptoms, or health concerns that remain over time without clear diagnosis despite evaluation and treatment (PA Comp. PC)

Essential Skills

- Information gathering
- History-taking
- Physical examination
- Discernment of important versus extraneous information
- Prioritization of actions and clinical care decisions based on information available and the patient's beliefs about their care
- Empathetic listening
- Relationship building
- Evidence-based decision-making

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to apply appropriate scientific evidence to patient care?
- Are graduates able to recognize sick versus healthy patients?

- Are graduates able to gather essential and accurate information about patients?

2. Society and Population Health

This domain is intended to ensure that graduates understand how the health of individual patients may be affected by and contribute to the health status of the larger community. Good health care providers are part of the fabric of the community. While caring for individual patients in a health care setting is often the focus of the PA's daily work, new graduates should appreciate the patient's existence within the broader context of society.

A population health approach is required for improving health outcomes and reducing health disparities. Competent graduates will understand how individual patients are affected by the communities in which they live and work. They will also be able to demonstrate an understanding of how their patients contribute to the health of the community and society at large. By understanding the community, environmental, genetic, and other influences on the health of a community, graduates will be able to accept the responsibility for the betterment of the patient populations they serve.

Competent graduates must be aware of their own biases and work intentionally to recognize that their ego and ethnocentric beliefs and norms can impact patient care.⁸ They will understand how civic responsibility, patient advocacy, service to the community, diversity of the workforce, and improving the health of underserved populations factor into patient care.²⁰

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to recognize and understand that the influences of the larger community may affect the health of patients and integrate knowledge of social determinants of health into care decisions.

Competencies

- 2.1 Recognize the cultural norms, needs, influences, and socioeconomic, environmental, and other population-level determinants affecting the health of the individual and community being served
- 2.2 Recognize the potential impacts of the community, biology, and genetics on patients and incorporate them into decisions of care
- 2.3 Demonstrate accountability and responsibility for removing barriers to health
- 2.4 Understand the role of structural disparities in causing illness
- 2.5 Engage members of the health care team in the surveillance of community resources to sustain and improve health
- 2.6 Engage the health care team in determining the adequacy of community resources
- 2.7 Reflect on personal and professional limitations in providing care
- 2.8 Exercise cultural humility

- 2.9 Elicit and hear the story of the individual and apply the context of the individual's life (including environmental influences, culture, and disease) when determining healthy versus ill patients
- 2.10 Understand and apply the fundamental principles of epidemiology
- 2.11 Recognize the value of the work of monitoring and reporting for quality improvement
- 2.12 Use appropriate literature to make evidence-based decisions on patient care

Essential Skills

- Patient advocacy
- Patient agency
- Self-advocacy
- Self-agency
- Active community engagement
- Resourcefulness
- Relationship development
- Self-awareness
- Interpersonal skills including influence, empathy, and humility
- Awareness of unconscious biases
- Information gathering
- Discernment of important versus extraneous information
- Prioritization of action steps based on information available
- Awareness of biases and attitudes towards others
- Empathetic listening

Questions to Consider

- Can graduates define key terminology and apply basic concepts of population health?
- Are graduates able to locate and secure resources for patients within a given community?
- Are graduates able to identify personal bias or knowledge deficits that would adversely affect delivery of patient-centered care?

3. Health Literacy and Communication

This domain is intended to underscore the importance of two key tenets required for patient-centered care: (1) the patient's capacity for understanding information about their health and (2) the ability of the health care provider to communicate with patients to ensure they understand their health and the care they are receiving. These are combined because they are closely connected.

Competent PAs understand the importance of helping and possess the skills to help patients become partners in their health care. Competent PA graduates will also use a variety of techniques to determine patients' capacities for understanding their health and the systems that serve them. For example, new graduates must be able to incorporate an understanding of genetics and pathophysiology as well as the importance of environmental and societal influences on health.

PA graduates must be emotionally intelligent and able to guide how best to communicate with patients, then adjust the content and style of their verbal communication for maximum clarity. Developing strategies to communicate effectively with patients will become increasingly important as demographics shift and reliance on technology continues to increase. Competent PA graduates will need to be able to establish rapport and communicate in meaningful ways with patients, regardless of the modality. In addition, competent PA graduates will need to be able to recognize and overcome linguistic and cultural barriers to effective communication, as well as understand different perspectives and expectations about health and how health care can impact health disparity.

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to communicate with patients as partners who engage in shared decision-making and who communicate, interpret, and express themselves as individuals with unique personal, cultural, and social values.

Competencies

- 3.1 Establish meaningful, therapeutic relationships with patients and families that allow for a deeper connection and create space for exploration of the patients' needs and goals to deliver culturally competent care (PA Comp. PC, FMM)
- 3.2 Interpret information so that patients can understand and make meaning out of the information conveyed to them
- 3.3 Recognize the need for and governing mandates that ensure patients have access to interpreters and appropriate resources when barriers to communication arise
- 3.4 Demonstrate insight and understanding about emotions and human responses to emotions that allow one to develop and manage interpersonal interactions (PCRS 4.7)
- 3.5 Communicate effectively with patients, families, and the public
- 3.6 Provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication

needs (CLAS)

- 3.7 Organize and communicate information with patients, families, community members, and health team members in a form that is understandable, avoiding discipline-specific terminology when possible, and checking to ensure understanding (IPEC CC2)

Essential Skills

- Self-awareness
- Knowing when to consult
- Awareness of unconscious biases
- Interpersonal skills
- Active listening
- Patient education
- Cultural competency
- Health literacy
- Trust-building

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to demonstrate sensitivity to patient health needs in the context of the patient's life and views on health and health care?
- Are graduates able to establish rapport and communicate with patients to appropriately address the patients' health needs?

4. Interprofessional Collaborative Practice and Leadership

This domain emphasizes that teamwork is key to delivering safe, quality health care, in a way that is complementary to the goals of the provider-patient partnership. PAs are well positioned to coordinate care across health professions and specialties. The profession's identity is grounded in team-based care. PAs have worked in collaboration with their physician and other colleagues since the profession began.

Competent PA graduates will have a firm grasp of the roles of PAs and other team members, and will demonstrate the ability to work effectively in teams, but not for this end unto itself. Rather, effective teamwork begins by ensuring that the goals of the patient remain the focus of the health care team.

As patient advocates, PAs will have to assume a leadership role on a health care team, and they will also need to understand how to contribute to quality patient care by working with other health care professionals. PAs who possess knowledge and skills in this domain will have the self- and team awareness to recognize limitations and rely on other members of the team to provide the highest level of patient care.

Leadership in this context is demonstrated regardless of title or status and is determined by the needs of the patient above all else. Knowing when to lead and when to follow is essential and demonstrates one's ability to value the needs of the patient over self. The ability to determine how to demonstrate leadership requires PAs to be competent in self-awareness, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to recognize that the patient is at the center of all health care goals and to partner with the patient to define the patient's health care goals.

Competencies

- 4.1 Articulate one's role and responsibilities to patients, families, communities, and other professionals (IPEC RR1)
- 4.2 Redirect the focus of the health care team to the needs of the patient
- 4.3 Assure patients that they are being heard
- 4.4 Ensure patients' needs are the focus over self and others
- 4.5 Contribute to the creation, dissemination, application, and translation of new health care knowledge and practices (PCRS 2.6)
- 4.6 Recognize when referrals are needed and make them to the appropriate health care provider
- 4.7 Coordinate care
- 4.8 Develop relationships and effectively communicate with physicians, other health professionals, and health care teams (PA Comp. Comm)
- 4.9 Use the full scope of knowledge, skills, and abilities of available health professionals to provide care that is safe, timely, efficient, effective, and equitable (IPEC RR5)
- 4.10 Use unique and complementary abilities of all members of the team to

optimize health and patient care (IPEC RR9)

- 4.11 Engage diverse professionals who complement one's own professional expertise, as well as associated resources, to develop strategies to meet specific health and health care needs of patients and populations (IPEC RR3)
- 4.12 Describe how professionals in health and other fields can collaborate and integrate clinical care and public health interventions to optimize population health (IPEC RR10)

Essential Skills

- Interpersonal skills including humility and beneficence
- Self-awareness
- Effective communication
- Empathetic listening
- Advocacy
- Teamwork
- Relationship building
- Care planning

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to work effectively as members of a team to address the patients' health needs?
- Are graduates able to articulate the appropriate scope of PA practice?
- Are graduates able to determine which patients require other team members to participate in the delivery of care to achieve the patient's goals?

5. Professional and Legal Aspects of Health Care

This domain is intended to stress the importance of practicing medicine in ethically and legally appropriate ways and emphasize the need for graduates to demonstrate professional maturity and accountability for delivering safe and quality care to patients and populations. Competent PA graduates will be able to articulate and adhere to standards of care and will possess knowledge of the laws and regulations that govern the delivery of health care in the United States. They will be able to demonstrate professional maturity by attending to the needs of the patient over self-interest. Competency in this domain requires graduates to use self-assessment and metacognitive skills, as well as exercise humility and compassion to provide patient-centered care regardless of the situation. This requires a level of maturity and professional identity that is demonstrated consistently, even in high-stress, ambiguous, and uncomfortable situations.

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to practice medicine in a beneficent manner, recognizing and adhering to standards of care while attuned to advancing social justice.

Competencies

- 5.1 Articulate standard of care practice
- 5.2 Admit mistakes and errors
- 5.3 Participate in difficult conversations with patients and colleagues
- 5.4 Recognize one's limits and establish healthy boundaries to support healthy partnerships
- 5.5 Demonstrate respect for the dignity and privacy of patients while maintaining confidentiality in the delivery of team-based care (IPEC VE2)
- 5.6 Demonstrate responsiveness to patient needs that supersedes self-interest (PCRS 5.2)
- 5.7 Demonstrate accountability to patients, society, and the profession (PCRS 5.4)
- 5.8 Exhibit an understanding of the regulatory environment

Essential Skills

- Interpersonal skills including humility, compassion
- Empathetic listening
- Ethical decision-making
- Integrity
- Accountability
- Responsibility
- Help-seeking behaviors
- Self-advocacy

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to demonstrate adherence to standards of care?

- Are graduates able to admit mistakes and take accountability for their actions?
- Are graduates able to discuss and explore ethical issues in a thoughtful, nonbiased manner that respects the autonomy of patients while demonstrating beneficence and non-maleficence?

6. Health Care Finance and Systems

This domain focuses on the essential knowledge and skills needed to successfully navigate the health care system to deliver high-quality, patient-centered care.

Competent graduates will understand how the micro and macro systems of health care impact patient outcomes, and they will be able to increase their capacity to improve access to care and quality of care. This requires graduates to not only identify the barriers but to see the avenues to quality care. Competency in this domain requires an understanding of the economic factors that affect access to care, including how to deliver high quality care in a value-based system. Graduates must also demonstrate an understanding of their role and productivity limits and potential and how it impacts the finances of their organizations.

Domain Description

Graduates will be able to articulate the essential aspects of value-based health care and apply this understanding to the delivery of safe and quality care.

Competencies

- 6.1 Recognize that health care is a business
- 6.2 Articulate individual providers' value-add to the health care team in terms of cost
- 6.3 Appreciate the value of the collaborative physician/PA relationship

Essential Skills

- Systems thinking
- Adaptability
- Leadership
- Stewardship of resources
- Help-seeking behaviors
- Reimbursement
- Coding
- Care coordination
- Technology fluency
- Patient and personal safety
- Quality improvement
- Evidence-based practice
- Practice-based improvement

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to articulate the defining characteristics of value-based health care and apply this knowledge to care for patients in a cost-conscious, fiscally responsible manner?
- Are graduates able to identify and resolve issues in the health system that affect the quality and safety of patient care?

7. Catholic Social Teaching

This domain focuses on the Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching.

Adopted from the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#).

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that if you want peace, work for justice. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's

creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

Domain Description

Graduates must be compassionate and empathetic in caring for patients and must be trustworthy and truthful in their professional dealings. They must act with integrity, honesty, and respect for patients' privacy and dignity.

Competencies

- 7.1 Recognize the Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- 7.2 Answer the Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- 7.3 Understand Rights and Responsibilities
- 7.4 Provide for the Poor and Vulnerable
- 7.5 Acknowledge the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- 7.6 Promote Solidarity
- 7.7 Care for God's Creation

Essential Skills

- Inclusiveness
- Equity
- Compassion
- Empathy
- Trustworthiness
- Truthfulness
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Respect
- Altruism
- Professionalism
- Cultural Awareness
- Excellence

Questions to Consider

- Are graduates able to demonstrate commitment to the Tenets of Catholic Social Teaching through lived experience while attending Assumption University as PA students?
- Are graduates committed to the highest levels of professionalism, integrity, and empathy expected of those individuals who have earned the privilege of providing care?