



## Guidance on Practice Agreements

Successful team practice by PAs and supervising physicians depends on all parties having a clear understanding of delegated duties and supervisory responsibilities. Many physician-PA teams find that written practice agreements help facilitate this understanding. Being clear enough about team practice to commit its parameters to writing will serve the physician-PA team, their colleagues, and their patients.

A “practice agreement,” sometimes called a “delegation agreement,” outlines in a general way the patient problems and procedures that the physician authorizes the PA to address or perform. The agreement should be reviewed and updated periodically, as the physician-PA team evolves in the way it delivers care. Like any partnership, the physician-PA team requires open communication and ongoing evaluation to remain effective.

### Guidelines for Team Practice

A physician-PA team drafting a practice agreement should begin by reviewing the state’s requirements governing PA supervision and scope of practice. They may wish to review the AAPA Issue Brief on the Physician-PA Team (available at [www.aapa.org/images/stories/IssueBriefs/Professional%20Issues/Physician-PA%20Team%20-%202010.pdf](http://www.aapa.org/images/stories/IssueBriefs/Professional%20Issues/Physician-PA%20Team%20-%202010.pdf)) and the AMA’s *Guidelines for Physician-Physician Assistant Practice*, which are included in AAPA Issue Brief on Physician Assistant Scope of Practice (available at <http://www.aapa.org/images/stories/IssueBriefs/Professional%20Issues/PA%20Scope%20of%20Practice%20-%202010.pdf>)

While each practice is unique, there are some basic expectations that supervising physicians should have for PAs and PAs for physicians. Considering the following may be useful as you start out:

### What the supervising physician should expect from the PA

- Ability to handle patient problems routine to the practice
- Willingness to seek physician input when necessary
- Concise and complete case presentation when consulting with the supervising physician
- Performance of follow-up

### What the PA should expect from the supervising physician:

- Ready access to supervising physician (i.e., timely return call)
- Learned advice
- Willingness on the part of physician to accept care of complex cases

### General guidelines for PA consultation with supervising physician:

- Life-threatening, persistent, or unusual cases
- Irrate or hostile patients or family members
- Cases that may have legal ramifications best handled by the supervising physician
- At the request of the patient
- When situations present that the physician and PA have pre-determined will be best served by the physician’s input. Ideally physician-PA teams have ongoing discussions about when such consultation should occur.

## State Law Requirements and a Word about Protocols

Many state licensing laws or rules require physician-PA teams to develop written practice agreements. For example, some states require that a copy of a practice agreement be kept on file in the supervising physician's primary practice site; in others, regulations require the medical board to approve practice agreements. States might refer to this document in different ways, including "written agreement" or "delegation agreement."

In addition, a few states require a "protocol." Clinicians may assume they want a highly detailed clinical protocol, but this is generally not what states intend. With a few notable exceptions, states usually are looking for a practice agreement, not a detailed clinical algorithm.

Physician-PA teams should be careful to follow the requirements of state law and rules in creating, maintaining, and updating practice agreements. PAs should check on whether and when practice agreements must be filed with the regulatory agency and whether changes require notification or approval of the board. You can find more information on each state's requirements by visiting the state's PA regulatory authority Web site. For a link to your PA licensing board, visit [www.aapa.org/advocacy-and-practice-resources/state-government-and-licensing/licensingbeginning-practice/515-physician-assistant-state-and-territorial-regulatory-authorities](http://www.aapa.org/advocacy-and-practice-resources/state-government-and-licensing/licensingbeginning-practice/515-physician-assistant-state-and-territorial-regulatory-authorities).

Some of the licensing boards that require practice agreements provide an example to assist PAs and supervising physicians in developing their own. There also are some boards that require a particular format. In either case, the information would be available on the licensing board's Web site.

If there is no template agreement provided by your state, the following sample practice agreement may be useful to help physician-PA teams delineate roles and responsibilities.

### Sample Practice Agreement

Supervising physician(s)

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Physician assistant

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Practice sites in which the physician assistant is authorized to perform patient care activities:

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Description of supervising physician(s) specialty and scope of practice: (for multiple supervising physicians, delineate differences in specialty and scope below)

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Description of physician assistant's delegated duties and responsibilities in the practice, including assessment, diagnosis, treatment, delegated prescriptive authority, and ordering or performing diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

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The PA is not authorized to participate in the following patient care activities or prescribe the following medications:

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Signature of physician(s) (Attach additional pages if necessary)

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Signature of physician assistant

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Date