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Canadian-based case studies of PA models of care (Commentaries on health services research)

Pauline Joyce

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, pjoyce@rcsi.ie

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Understanding the role and value of PAs: Canadian –based case studies of PA models of care.

Abstract

Delivering high-quality, effective, and sustainable services is both a top priority and one of the most pressing challenges facing governments and businesses as they look to balance health care service demands and costs in the context of an aging population. The PA professional is perceived as a relatively new occupation in Canada. One of the current challenges of the profession in Canada is the lack of data on the impact of PAs from a productivity and cost-effectiveness perspective. This report aims to set the stage and provide context to better understand the role of PAs within health systems and comprises a literature review and brief Canadian-based case studies of PA models of care. The intention is to provide a better understanding of the role and impact that PAs have had in various health care settings across Canada¹.

Commentary by Pauline Joyce

While there are studies available demonstrating the multiple benefits that PAs offer to health systems, their acceptance in Canada remains low. The authors of this case-based study suggest the need for funding and remuneration barriers to be removed before PAs can optimize their contributions to Canada's health care systems. As one would expect, the lack of regulation is a significant barrier, as it is seen as a safety issue by other provider groups. The key arguments in this report center around the need for more retrospective and prospective case-control research studies to measure the quantitative impact of PAs in building a better business case. Several projects which are included in the report demonstrate that PAs can deliver similar, or even better, outputs or outcomes for designated competencies with respect to other health professionals. Communications on pilot successes and how to overcome challenges should be shared with stakeholders across the country, especially on leading practices.

Reference

1. Grimes K, Gabriela P. (2016) Value of physician assistants. Understanding the role of physician assistants within health systems. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

Dr. Pauline Joyce Ed.D
Academic Director, MSc Physician Associate Studies.
RCSI School of Medicine
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
Email: pjoyce@rcsi.ie