

PA Project Update

McMaster graduates first class of PAs

Jobs secured in primary care, orthopaedics, emergency, internal medicine

Jodi Pachal will be putting her Physician Assistant (PA) training to good use at the Ottawa Hospital as the “anchor” to the orthopaedic trauma team, the point person who follows the orthopaedic trauma patients and helps ensure continuity of care.

“These can be complicated patients who, due to the nature of their emergent presentation, rarely have a clear

discharge plan,” says Dr. Wade Gofton, Staff Orthopedic Surgeon, the Ottawa Hospital, and primary PA supervisor.

Pachal, 39, says that one of her main goals will be to develop this plan in a timely fashion, and work with receiving facilities depending on their needs – rehab, convalescence, home hospital – to ensure the patient and their family, move efficiently toward their rehab goals.

Originally a radiation therapist trained at the Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre, Pachal subsequently taught people how to use the radiation therapy machines and software. She was first introduced to PAs while working in sales in the U.S., and then received care from one after an orthopaedic injury. She was exploring PA programs in the U.S. when she heard about McMaster University’s PA Education Program.

The university’s inaugural class of 21 students, selected from a pool of more than 250 applicants, started the 24-month program in September 2008. The students came from varied backgrounds including paramedic training, social work, genetics, epidemiology, and engineering. They received their Bachelor of Health Sciences (Physician Assistant) degree during convocation ceremonies on Nov. 19, 2010.

Twenty PA graduates successfully secured employment in Ontario’s hospitals, health care centres, and family practices, in a range of specialties including emergency medicine, primary care, orthopaedics, and general and specialty internal medicine.

Geographically, the PA graduates are located in Barrie, Etobicoke, Durham, Hamilton, Kingston, Oakville, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Toronto, Markham, and Windsor.



Assistant dean of the PA program John Cunningham, on left, with the first graduating class of physician assistants which includes: Nancy Aza, Rachael Bonisteel, Kristen Burrows, Genniene Di Berardo, Ohood Elzibak, Jacqueline Harden, Karen Humphries, Sung Hoon Kim, Megan Leavitt, Kathleen MacFarlane, Van Nguyen, Jodi Pachal, Michael Peirone, Nathalie Riaboy, Donna-Marie Rusenstrom, Ni Shen, Emily Sokolov, Leslie St. Jacques, Maureen Taylor, Lauren Wigman, Carly Yealland.

Credit: McMaster University

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T H E P A P R O J E C T T E A M



First class of PAs (cont'd)

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care launched a grant initiative to support the employment of the McMaster PA graduates. This grant initiative was met with overwhelming interest; 150 applications for grants were submitted and more than 100 were approved. Prospective employers were a mix of existing demonstration project sites as well as a larger number of sites new to PAs.

Pachal started working at the hospital in October 2010. Her duties include assisting in the operating room, assessing referrals

from other services or the ER, and working in the fracture clinic and orthopaedics clinic. In the ER she is involved in splinting, casting, and doing closed reductions.

“The experience has been great... I think the advantage of working at an academic centre is that they are used to learners and residents, so I was readily accepted by the nursing and allied health team members. Since people see the close working relationship that I have with the three team physicians, they are comfortable in asking me to get things done for them and more importantly, that I understand what limits I have based on what the physicians have set up for me.”

Working closely with the medical residents, Pachal is able to further patient care while helping others see and understand the value of the PA within the care team. The hope is that her participation in this team “will improve patients’ experiences in hospital, helping to provide the highest

possible quality care while reducing delays in treatment and discharge.” And Pachal has already had the chance to contribute to these goals by assisting in the OR, ER, and clinics, as well as managing patients on the floor.

Another recent PA graduate, Ohood Elzibak, 23, was drawn to the McMaster program out of her desire to work in a clinical setting and pioneer a new role in health care. “I felt very confident going down this route,” she says. “I felt like this was the right role for me, and I knew I needed to explore

that. It’s been a phenomenal two years. You develop a really close relationship with your classmates, the facilitators, and the staff... It was a new experience for everyone.”

During her clerkship year, Elzibak discovered a passion for the intense, fast-paced operating room environment during a two-month rotation with Dr. Ivan Wong, an orthopaedic surgeon at Hamilton Health Sciences. Wong hired Elzibak as the first PA member of his surgical team.

An assistant professor of surgery at McMaster, Wong had previously worked with PAs during his fellowship training in the United States. “In the future, I see just about every orthopaedic surgeon working with PAs, and sometimes multiple ones,” he says. “In the United States, it’s already been shown many times that PAs improve the cost-effectiveness of practice, and increase patient care as well as patient satisfaction.”

With files from McMaster University

What they had to say

“Our physician assistant graduates are exceptional ambassadors of this new profession. Through their commitment to excellence and collaborative care, they have positioned themselves as essential members of today’s interprofessional health care teams. Their McMaster foundation in problem-based, small-group learning will serve them well as they move forward in their careers.”

Dr. John Cunnington, assistant dean of the physician assistant program

“Congratulations to all of the graduates of the Physician Assistant program at McMaster University. The Physician Assistant role is one of several new roles we have introduced to Ontario’s health care system that are improving access to health care and helping to reduce wait times throughout the province. I’m pleased to support today’s graduates and wish them well in their new careers.”

Deb Matthews, Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

“PAs are valuable contributors to our health care system because Ontario’s doctors know that when all health care providers work together, patients benefit from an enhanced level of care.”

Dr. Mark MacLeod, president of the Ontario Medical Association

From the field

In this issue, we chat with Peter Bond, a PA who joined the Northeastern Manitoulin Family Health Team in Little Current, Ont., as part of the PA demonstration project expansion into Family Health Teams (FHTs).

When Peter Bond meets with patients, he explains that his role as a physician assistant is to assist physicians in providing preventive care and follow-up care.

“The patients seem to be very pleased with the idea they can get in and be seen in such a short time frame,” he says, noting that not just patients, but colleagues too seem happy to have him on board. “I’ve been welcomed with open arms and nurtured quite well.”

Bond started working at the clinic, which is attached to the Manitoulin Health Centre in Little Current, in March 2010. With a total of 27 staff, including six physicians, he helps serve 6,000 rostered patients and an additional 7,000 seasonal patients drawn each year to the scenic fishing and wilderness mecca in the northern part of Lake Huron each year.



Peter Bond, PA at the Northeastern Manitoulin Family Health Team in Little Current, ON

The site was one of four northern teams accepted into the FHT demonstration project. The FHT serves the communities of Northeastern Manitoulin Island, Whitefish River First Nation, Wikwemikong First Nation, Sheguiandah First nation, AOK First Nation, and Bidwell and Sheguiandah townships.

Originally from Manitoulin, Bond spent 25 years in the Armed Forces, based in Toronto, Germany, North Bay, and Petawawa, with tours in Bosnia and Somalia. He completed his PA course in 2001.

“We integrated Peter with the entire team, not just doctors.”

Bond’s main focus with the FHT is preventive health screening for patients coming in to see their physicians, ensuring that immunizations, colorectal checks, mammograms, and Pap tests are up to date. He also manages follow-up care for patients with conditions like hypertension and diabetes.

“We looked at areas where, if we put in a qualified PA, we could gain more physician, nurse practitioner, and RN time,” says Judy Miller, director of the FHT. “We integrated Peter with the entire team, not just doctors.” The result, she says, is a workload shift that has improved access and efficiencies.

Bond also does annual physicals for residents at two nearby long-term care facilities. Additionally, he assists with Ontario Telemedicine Network services.

Two days a month Bond is also involved in procedural sedation for endoscopies done at the hospital. “The physician who had managed these procedures is now back in the clinic providing a full day of service,” says Miller. “That’s a win-win for everybody.”

Online networking info for PAs

All PAs involved in the demonstration projects are encouraged to check out the Ontario Hospital Association project web site:

<https://whiteboard.oha.com>

The site contains project documents (including, for example, sample medical directives used at various sites), bulletin boards for networking and discussion, and a media room that has the latest coverage of the initiative. It’s a great space to share documents, connect with others in the project, or just keep up on the latest project news. If you need help accessing this password-protected site, please contact Andreaanna Grabham (agrabham@oha.com).

In the news



In the Nov. 22, 2010 *Kingston Whig-Standard*, Dr. Robert French of the Centennial Family Health Team praises the contributions of new McMaster PA grad Meagan

Leavitt. He says having a PA on the team will let him do more of the work that a doctor should be doing and increase the number of patients he can see at the west-end clinic.

"I was always one to try the new things, and I think this is a wonderful thing that the government is doing," he said. "Having a physician assistant gives doctors more time to spend in their practice, and gives them more time to spend with difficult patients. It really is a good news story for everyone."



In a December 2010 issue of the *Brockville Recorder*, Dr. Elizabeth Brown, interim emergency services director at Brockville General Hospital, talks about how PA Tim Ralph helps the department deal with patients of a less-critical nature, freeing up the physician to deal with critical cases.

"I can remember a case where Tim spent probably more than two hours suturing up a very significant laceration in a pregnant woman who had fallen," she recounted. "As you can imagine, there's only one doctor most of the time in our emergency department. If the doctor had to spend two and a half hours sewing up a cut, it would obviously restrict the ability of the department to operate."

Project extension

Planning is underway to extend demonstration projects to March 31, 2012. The aim is to maintain existing health services and a stable PA workforce while a long-term policy and funding framework for PAs in Ontario is developed.

For more information, please contact your respective project leads:

- ◆ Ontario Hospital Association, Andreanna Grabham, agrabham@oha.com, 416-205-1447
- ◆ Ontario Medical Association, Carol Jacobson, Carol.Jacobson@oma.org, 416-340-2984
- ◆ Association of Ontario Health Centres, Mary Chudley, mary@aohc.org, 416-236-2539 x 307

PA Day

To capitalize on the success and momentum of two previous PA Days, a third PA professional education event is in the works for later this year. The focus will be on fostering the PA role in Ontario. PAs have been surveyed for their ideas about this event and for topics of interest.

Stay tuned for more information!

The physician assistant role was announced in May 2006 with the launch of HealthForceOntario, the government's health human resources strategy. The goal of HealthForceOntario is to give the people of Ontario access to the right number and mix of qualified healthcare providers, now and in the future.

The PA initiative is being led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Medical Association. They are joined by the Ontario Hospital Association and the Association of Ontario Health Centres in introducing physician assistants to healthcare teams at sites across the province.

For more information about the PA initiative, go to www.healthforceontario.ca/pa