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Summary Report for the Leng Review

Evaluating Physician Associate Patient Multi-Source Feedback

CMAPs College of Medical Associate Professionals

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Abstract

Physician Associates (PAs) are increasingly being integrated into the NHS to address workforce pressures. This study explores patient perspectives on the role of PAs in primary care, focusing on professionalism, clinical competence, and overall satisfaction.

A survey of 111 responses was conducted, with 86 valid submissions analysed. Quantitative results showed high patient satisfaction, with average PA evaluation scores ranging from 4.8 to 4.9 out of 5. Patients particularly praised PAs' listening skills, and clinical competence. Qualitative feedback highlighted empathy, effective communication, and trust in PAs' care.

The findings indicate that patients view PAs positively, valuing their competence and interpersonal skills. Further research comparing PA consultations to those with other healthcare professionals, both in primary and secondary care, is recommended to provide deeper insights.

Introduction

The role of Physician Associates (PAs), a well-established profession in countries such as the United States, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, was introduced in England in response to significant workforce shortages that placed a strain on medical professionals across the country (1) (2). As trained healthcare professionals, PAs can alleviate the pressure on both primary and secondary care services by working under the supervision of a consultant or senior General Practitioner (GP) (3). More importantly, PAs can provide continuity of care for patients on hospital wards or in General Practices, while enabling doctors in training to make the most of their specialty rotations and the medical team to deal with presentation in a way that is appropriate to their expertise and experience (2).

In theory, the introduction of PAs within the NHS was seen as a cost-effective and safe solution to address the challenges faced by healthcare professionals (2). However, there has recently been a divergence of opinion regarding the impact of PAs on healthcare. A study conducted in 2019 found that PAs contributed a flexible clinical addition to the secondary care workforce and noted that patients were generally positive about the care provided by PAs (4). In contrast, a 2024 study reported that a significant number of GPs felt that PAs posed a challenge to patient safety (5).

This survey aims to explore patient perspectives on the safety and appropriateness of PAs in primary care. The study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion surrounding the evolution of the PA role within the NHS, particularly considering recent changes in public opinion and regulatory developments. These changes have left healthcare professionals questioning the potential risks associated with PAs, while also putting employed PAs at risk of limited career progression and employability (2).

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Methodology

A survey was distributed through an online platform hosted by the College of Medical Associate Professionals (CMAPs). The survey was shared via email lists, professional WhatsApp groups, and through word of mouth.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and there were no incentives provided. Physician Associates (PAs) explained the nature and purpose of the survey to their patients, who could then choose whether to complete the form.

The survey included both closed and open-ended questions to capture the patients' experiences, their perceptions of the PA's code of conduct, professionalism, ability to manage the presenting complaint within their competencies, and their capacity to appropriately inform the management plan (Appendix 1).

The responses were subsequently uploaded by PAs, who were required to provide identifiable details, such as a GMC or PAMVR number, to ensure data integrity and prevent duplicate responses.
The data portal was open from 19th January 2025 to 28th February 2025.

In alignment with best practices for research governance, the NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC) decision tool was applied to assess whether this project required formal NHS ethics approval. Based on the tool's guidance, the activities undertaken in this project do not fall within the scope that mandates NHS REC oversight. Consequently, no formal submission to an NHS Research Ethics Committee was necessary.

Results

A total of 111 submissions were collected. Out of these 25 were null as either incomplete or not validated by a GMC/PAMVR number.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first question could simply be answered on a scale from 1 (least importance) to 5 (most importance).

The next set of seven questions could be answered very good (coded 5), good (coded 4), satisfactory (coded 3), less than satisfactory (coded 2), poor (coded 1), don't know (no code).

The last four questions could be answered strongly agree (coded 5), agree (coded 4), neutral (coded 3), disagree (coded 2), strongly disagree (coded 1), does not apply (no code).

Below Table 1. shows the average of total scores for the main elements of the Patient Feedback Questionnaire apart from the ones that asked who was filling the questionnaire, the one exploring the reason for seeing a PA, the one enquiring about the patient's perception of importance of their visit in relation to their health and wellbeing, and lastly, any other the comments that patients were invited to voluntarily add (see Appendix 1.).

Table 1

Patient Questionnaire about PA Consultation	Average Score (1-5)
On a scale of 1 to 5, how important to your health and wellbeing was your reason for visiting today?	4.4
Introducing self	4.8
Being polite	4.9
Listening to you	4.9
Assessing your medical condition	4.9
Explaining your condition and treatment	4.9
Involving you in decisions about your treatment	4.9
Providing or arranging your treatment for you	4.8
This PA will keep information about me confidential	4.9
This PA is honest and trustworthy	4.8
I am confident about this PAs ability to provide care	4.9
I would be happy to see this PA again	4.9

Qualitative Data Analysis

Several comments indicated that PAs were able to identify and manage medical conditions effectively. Examples included the successful management of ongoing health issues, correct diagnoses, and even life-saving interventions, all contributing to improved patient outcomes.

Patients reported appreciating the empathetic nature of PAs, their willingness to listen, and their ability to create a comfortable environment for discussing health concerns. Effective communication was frequently mentioned, with patients feeling well-informed and reassured about their treatment plans.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight a broadly positive patient experience with Physician Associate (PA) consultations. Out of the 111 submissions collected, 25 were deemed invalid due to being either incomplete or lacking validation through a GMC/PAMVR number. Despite this, the remaining 86 valid responses offer valuable insights into the quality of care provided by PAs.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis revealed consistently high scores across all assessed aspects of the PA consultations. With average ratings ranging from 4.4 (importance of visit), and scoring 4.8 to 4.9 out of 5 for the PA evaluation scores. This data suggests a high level of patient satisfaction. Notably, many assessed areas received the highest scores (4.9), indicating that patients felt respected and heard. Similarly, confidence in the PA's ability to provide care (4.9) and willingness to see the PA again (4.9) reflect trust and satisfaction with the quality of care.

Interestingly, the slightly lower but still positive scores for introducing themselves and trustworthiness (4.8 each) may suggest minor reservations or general patient uncertainty rather than specific concerns. However, given the overall strong ratings, these results still reflect a high degree of confidence in PA professionalism.

The consistency of scores across communication, clinical care, and decision-making indicates that PAs are perceived as effective and reliable healthcare providers. The minimal variation between ratings also suggests that the patient experience is relatively uniform, with no major areas of dissatisfaction emerging from the data.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis reinforces the quantitative results by providing further depth into patient perceptions. Many comments highlighted the clinical competence of PAs, with specific mentions of accurate diagnoses, effective management of chronic conditions, and even life-saving interventions. Such feedback indicates that patients not only perceive PAs as competent but also value their contribution to positive health outcomes.

Patients also emphasised the empathetic and communicative nature of PAs. The ability to create a welcoming and supportive environment, actively listen, and clearly explain conditions and treatments were frequently cited. This suggests that PAs are viewed not only as clinically proficient but also as compassionate and patient centred.

Furthermore, the qualitative feedback highlights the reassuring nature of PA consultations, with many patients expressing feeling well-informed and confident in their care plans. This aligns with the high quantitative ratings for communication and confidence in PA care.

Limitations and further work

The absence of comparative data with other healthcare professionals makes it difficult to contextualise the results. Future studies could explore how PA consultations compare to those with general practitioners (GPs) or other clinicians.

Moreover, while the overall ratings were high, further exploration into the slightly lower scores on confidentiality and trustworthiness may offer insights into subtle areas for improvement, such as enhancing patient education around data privacy practices or clarifying the PA's role in the healthcare team.

Finally, future studies may consider a larger sample size across primary and secondary care that will offer varied data reflective of a bigger patient pool than the one this study was able to consider.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the feedback collected from patients indicates strong support for the role of Physician Associates (PAs) within healthcare. Patients consistently recognise and appreciate the valuable contributions PAs make in primary care settings. The findings of this study indicate a high level of patient satisfaction with PA consultations, both in terms of clinical care and interpersonal skills. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data highlights the competence, empathy, and communication skills of PAs, which are essential for delivering effective patient-centred care.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, particularly its relatively small sample size and the lack of comparative data with other healthcare professionals. Hence, PAs continue to play a growing role within the NHS, exploring this data further with additional studies and while addressing potential areas for improvement will be key to ensuring continued patient trust and satisfaction.

Declaration of Interest

All authors are MAPs with the exception of Maria Herdt.

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