



A giant step forward for British PAs

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The physician associate profession in the United Kingdom reached a crucial milestone in its development recently. Although PAs have been working in the UK since the early 2000s, they have been doing so without formal recognition as a profession. This lack of recognition and attendant regulation of the profession has meant that PAs cannot prescribe and cannot order tests that use ionizing radiation. It has also meant that PAs have had to live with the possibility that their profession could be disbanded and their jobs terminated. We have long sought regulation to provide a legal framework in which PAs can work to their full potential, to protect our title from use by those who have not completed formal education as a PA, to drive up the educational standards used in the training of PAs, and ultimately to protect patients.

On October 12, 2018, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in the UK, Matt Hancock, announced that the UK government would recognize and regulate PAs.^{1,2} The PA professional organization in the UK (the UK Association of PAs, now the Faculty of Physician Associates) has been lobbying for this outcome intensely for the past 13 years. All this lobbying work undertaken by the professional organization was performed by unpaid volunteers who are dedicated to the advancement of the profession, and to the health and safety of our patients. We also are very grateful to Health Education England, the Royal

College of Physicians, and several other medical professional societies that have also offered their support, credibility, and lobbying efforts to bring us to this day.

At the time of this writing, the government has not named a regulatory authority. Our regulator will likely either be the group that regulates physicians or the group that regulates allied healthcare professionals. It will take another 18 to 24 months for the legislative framework and regulations to be written to govern PA practice and to finalize a register of licensees. Once these tasks have been completed, PAs will be able to seek prescribing authority and be able to request tests with ionizing radiation. Regulation of the profession will also mean that PAs are recognized as a credible workforce by the government, colleagues, and the general public. It means we are here to stay.

The PA profession has been growing dramatically in the last few years despite the lack of regulation. The UK has about 850 qualified PAs and 2,000 students enrolled in PA training programs. With an increasingly aging and comorbid population, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) needs more medical providers to meet patient needs. PAs want to not only provide high-quality medical care but also to deploy the same high-quality communication skills and compassion for which PAs around the world are known. We are exceedingly excited about the future of the profession in the UK and the effect PAs can have in assisting the NHS in its mission to provide excellent care for all patients for generations to come. **JAAPA**

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DOI:10.1097/01.JAA.0000549604.53416.67

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