

Patient Care

A guide to obtaining a job in
healthcare

GVSU PRE-PA CLUB

What's Ahead



Why Patient Care Experience Matters

Choosing the Right Position

How to Apply Successfully

Starting Your First Job

Conclusion

Why Patient Care Experience is Important

Gaining healthcare experience is important in many aspects for students. First, and most importantly, it can validate or redirect a students' path and goals. Starting an entry-level position in healthcare can be a low-stakes way for students to experience the field, prior to beginning a career or investing in Physician Assistant (PA) graduate education.

Additionally, this exposure can equip students with an introduction to the jargon, flow, empathy, and practices of the field. This will provide students with confidence and a background for education, or simply support a greater appreciation for the system caring for their own health.

Finally, a substantive component of the Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) is Patient Care Experience (PCE). PCE is an experience "in which you are directly responsible for a patient's care" (Experiences, n.d.). CASPA also accounts for Healthcare Experience (HCE). HCE includes "both paid and unpaid work in a health or health-related field where you are not directly responsible for a patient's care, but may still have patient interaction" (CASPA). These experiences will be considered by PA programs during applications.

Prior patient care experience is particularly important as the PA profession began as a secondary career. The content of PA education relies on entering students having a wealth of health care experience.

Choosing the *Right* Position

Patient Care Experience can take shape in many forms. The *right* position considers what is best for the student's goals, schedule, and interests. This guide will explore common, entry-level positions, however it should be noted that more advanced positions can also be applicable in PA school applications.

Large hospital systems located near Grand Valley State University's campuses are listed below. Patient care jobs are not limited to these locations. Private practices and nursing homes can also be explored.

Locations	Links
Corewell Health	https://careers.corewellhealth.org/us/en/
Trinity Health	https://jobs.trinity-health.org/trinityhealthmichigan/careers-in-west-michigan
University of Michigan Health-West	https://uofmhealthwest.org/careers/
Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital	https://maryfreebed.wd12.myworkdayjobs.com/MFB
Holland Hospital	https://hollandhospital.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/External
Munson Healthcare	https://careers.munsonhealthcare.org

Nurse Technician (NT)/ Patient Care Technician (PCT) / Patient Care Assistants (PCA)

The title of this position can vary per location, however the role is fairly standard. NTs, PCTs, and PCAs work under the guidance of a Registered Nurse (RN) or Provider. Corewell lists responsibilities including “taking vitals, checking blood sugars, bed bathing, ambulating, wound care, catheterization and acting as a safety attendant for patients” (Nursing Support, n.d.). NTs, PCTs, and PCAs can work in a variety of hospital units or nursing homes.

Typically no specific certification is required for this position, other than standard Basic Life Support (BLS). BLS certification opportunities are sometimes provided following employment, it can otherwise be obtained through the American Red Cross (BLS Certification, n.d.).

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)

CNAs typically have similar duties to a NT or PCT. This includes dressing, bathing, feeding, toileting, and obtaining vital signs (CNA, n.d.).

The difference between CNAs and NT/PCTs would be in training. CNAs require a “state-approved training course and [must] pass the state certification exam” (CNA, n.d.). This typically takes between 4-12 weeks to obtain. It can be obtained through multiple training programs, including through Grand Rapids Community College (Certified Nurse Aide Training Program, n.d.).

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)

EMTs “access injuries and illnesses, provide emergency medical care, and may transport patients to medical facilities” (EMTs and Paramedics, 2025). A license is required to practice as an EMT takes at least 3 months to obtain. Life EMS is a reputable source for obtaining the license (Emergency Medical Technician, n.d.).

Home Health Aide

Home Health Aides “monitor the condition of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses and help them with daily living activities” (Home Health and Personal Care Aides, 2025). Training requirements and duties can vary per position.

Medical Assistant (MA)

MAAs “complete administrative and clinical tasks, such as scheduling appointments and taking patients’ vital signs” (Medical Assistants, 2025). They typically work under the guidance of a provider in outpatient settings.

Often, MAs require a certification which can take several months. This certification can be obtained through multiple programs including Grand Rapids Community College (Medical Assistant Program, n.d.).

Ambulatory Clinical Technician (ACT)

An ACT also works in outpatient settings, under the guidance of Provider or RN. Responsibilities include “rooming patients, collecting vitals, and assisting in minor office procedures” (Nursing Support, n.d.). Some clerical work may also be required.

Certifications required are typically limited to BLS.

Medical Scribe

A medical scribe “helps [providers] provide more effective and efficient care by saving them time by documenting findings from patient exams and assessments” (What It’s Like to Be a Medical Scribe, n.d.). Training typically occurs on the job. This experience often falls under healthcare experience, rather than patient care experience, as it lacks the direct care component.

Phlebotomist

Phlebotomists “draw blood for tests, transfusions, research, or blood donations” (Phlebotomists, 2025). They can work in both hospital or outpatient settings.

A phlebotomy certification is often preferred, which can take a few weeks. This is offered through multiple programs, including Phlebotomy Training Specialists (Phlebotomy Training, n.d.).



Remember:

**The *right* patient
care experience
is different for
everyone.**

How to Apply *Successfully*

It can be daunting to begin a position in healthcare, but *everyone* begins somewhere. There are many helpful resources provided by GVSU that will be explored.



Finding Where to Apply

When applying to positions, it can be effective to cast a wide net. This means to apply to multiple positions and/or within multiple hospital systems.

A helpful resource offered by Grand Valley is *Handshake*. “Handshake is a powerful online resource connecting GVSU students & alumni to top employers and career resources, and employers to top GVSU candidates” (Handshake, 2024). Job hunting can also be done independently using the links provided on an earlier slide.

Building a Resume and Cover Letter

A resume and cover letter act as the first impression for job candidates. It is important to present a succinct and professional resume and cover letter.

The GVSU Career Center provides guides, samples, and offers resume and cover letter reviews (Resumes and Cover Letters, 2026). Utilizing this resource can set students up for success.

Preparing for Interviews

A prepared interviewer is a confident interviewer. Understand the role and be prepared to connect applicable experiences and skills to the desired role. If there is no previous healthcare experience, relate other work experiences to the position and share relevant coursework.

The GVSU Career Center also offers interview support in the form of practice interviews and the *Big Interview* resource (Interviewing, 2026). Often interviews are formatted first over the phone, then may progress to in-person or virtually. Dress professionally for virtual and in-person interviews. GVSU often partners with JCPenney to offer a “Suit Up” event in which business casual, suits, and other work apparel is offered at a discounted price.

Prior to the interview, have questions prepared for employers. Be sure to thank interviewers for their time and consideration during or following the interview.

Starting the Job

Celebrate the start of the start of a new learning opportunity! This is an important milestone in the road to becoming a Physician Assistant. Do not be afraid to ask questions, and take note of skills and experiences acquired.

Often, specific attire or scrubs are required for these roles. These can be found at *The Uniform Shop*, *The Uniform Outlet*, or *Nye Uniform Co*, all of which are located near GVSU's campuses. Note requirements and regulations for specific positions or hospital systems before purchasing.

Stay Organized

As mentioned, an important part of CASPA is documenting experiences. Keep a log of hours worked; these can be kept in an organized log or through pay slips. One helpful resource is provided through the *Pre-PA Clinic*, this CASPA log can keep track of hours of work, volunteer, shadowing, and more. A personal copy can be made using the link below.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GfDBr23rQmgIGkwqXv39tRZdVYmIHW7G_D2NQtrZZJw/edit?usp=sharing

It can also be helpful for students to log notable experiences. These can later be referenced when writing a personal statement, during program interviews, and when narrowing an individual's answer to the question, "why PA?".



Conclusion

Working in healthcare is an opportunity that proves both challenging and meaningful. It is a field that requires lifelong learning and growing as both a care provider and person.

The many shared resources provided by Grand Valley State University can set up Pre-PA students for success. The Pre-PA Club remains a resource for students to gain knowledge and support during the journey to becoming a PA. This resource was created with the goal that students can *enjoy* while *becoming*.



Julie Fiser

President

Author

Madeleine Dombrowski

Vice President

Editor

Sia Patel

Treasurer

Editor

Dr. Andrew Booth

Faculty Advisor

Editor

Sources

BLS Certification (n.d.). American Red Cross.

<https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/bls-training/bls-certification>

Experiences (n.d.). CASPA.

https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_CASPA_Application/CASPA_Supporting_Information/2_Experiences

Certified Nurse Aide Training Program (n.d.). GRCC.

<https://www.grcc.edu/schools-departments/school-workforce-training/workforce-training-programs/healthcare/certified-nurse-aide-training-program>

Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) Classes & Nurse Assistant Training (NAT) (n.d.). American Red Cross.

<https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/lp/certified-nursing-assistant-nat>

Emergency Medical Technician (n.d.). Life EMS Ambulance.

<https://lifeems.com/education/ems-training/emergency-medical-technician/>

EMTs and Paramedics (2025, August 28). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/emts-and-paramedics.htm>

Handshake (2024, October 29). GVSU Career Center. <https://www.gvsu.edu/careers/handshake-18.htm>

Home Health and Personal Care Aides (2025, August 25). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home-health-aides-and-personal-care-aides.htm>

Interviewing (2026, May 4). GVSU Career Center. <https://www.gvsu.edu/careers/interviewing-162.htm>

Medical Assistant Program (n.d.). GRCC.

<https://www.grcc.edu/schools-departments/school-workforce-training/job-training-programs/medical-assistant>

Medical Assistants (2025, August 28). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/medical-assistants.htm>

Phlebotomists (2025, August 28). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/phlebotomists.htm>

Nursing Support (n.d.). Corewell Health. <https://careers.corewellhealth.org/us/en/c/nursing-support-jobs?s=1>

Phlebotomy Training in Grand Rapids, MI (n.d.). Phlebotomy Training Specialists.

<https://phlebotomyusa.com/locations/grand-rapids/>

Resumes and Cover Letters (2026, May 4). GVSU Career Center.

www.gvsu.edu/careers/resume-guide-178.htm