Outreach by American Academy of Nephrology PAs Enhances Care, Spurs Interest

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Physician assistants (PAs) are licensed clinicians, trained in the medical model, who practice medicine in every specialty, setting, and state. They are dedicated to expanding access to care and transforming health through patient-centered, team-based medical practice, and as such, nephrology is a perfect home. In 1997, a cohort of nephrology PAs, under the auspices of the American Academy of Physician Assistants, created a specialty organization—American Academy of Nephrology PAs (AANPA)—for all facets of nephrology PAs (e.g., office, dialysis, transplant, and intensive care unit). In 2020, of >148,000 PAs in the United States working in 70 medical and surgical subspecialties, only 0.4% claimed nephrology as their practice specialty (1, 2) (Figure 1).

With such limited representation and a shortage of both nephrologists and nephrology PAs, AANPA initiated outreach to referring practitioners to decrease concerns with referrals, as missing data, inappropriate timing, and/or missed diagnoses. Outreach was two-pronged and included oral continuing medical education (CME) 1 presentations and journal articles.

Offering kidney-based lectures to state and national PA organizations, with expert speakers supplied by AANPA, has been extremely popular. This has morphed into AANPA members teaching the nephrology section for multiple PA programs across the United States. The organization has found that its speakers make nephrology more accessible to students, and because the speakers are excited about the topic, it is more interesting to the students. The goal of AANPA is to increase student interest in nephrology rotations, because nephrology is an elective in all PA schools. The second outreach that the organization implemented was in a written format, called Nephrology Nuggets, a case-based CME program offered to all PAs and nurse practitioners (NPs) at a very low cost (<$1/CME credit). “Nuggets” is a collection of patient cases that have been managed by AANPA members (3). Nephrology may not include large numbers of practitioners, but it does provide interesting stories.

AANPA first nephrology-focused article, “Medication dosing in patients with chronic kidney disease” (4), published in the Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants in 2013, was awarded Clinical Article of the Year.

References


Figure 1. NCCPA PA medical practice specialty report 2020: Number of PAs practicing in each area

- Primary Care/General Practice Adults/Peds-25,956
- Surgery Adults/Peds-23,110
- Other Adult/Peds Subspecialties-33,163
- Emergency medicine Adult/Peds-13,540
- Nephrology Adult/Peds-408

Includes data for all PAs who answered the profile question for practice specialty. Total respondents = 106,606. NCCPA, National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants.