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## The Physician's Assistant Program in South Dakota

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# Economics Newsletter

Economics Department

• South Dakota State University

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## THE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT PROGRAM IN SOUTH DAKOTA

What is a physician's assistant? What duties will such a person perform? Will such a program dilute the quality of medical services now being provided? These questions and many more are of concern to the consumers of health services in South Dakota.

### The South Dakota Law

House Bill No. 674 passed by the 1973 Legislature created a physician's assistant program for the State of South Dakota thus making this the 26th state to pass such a program. At least 13 other states are considering similar legislation.

South Dakota law provides for two kinds of assistants; assistant to the primary care physician and assistant to the specialist physician.

The physician's assistant program is designed to help meet the critical shortage of medical practitioners in rural communities.

### Training Required of Assistants

The assistant must be a graduate of an approved program of instruction in either primary care or a clinical specialty and have passed a certification examination administered by the State Board of Medical and Osteopathic Examiners. In addition the assistant must have at least two years' experience with patients in a clinical setting.

### Physician Responsibility

Physician's assistants work under the direct supervision of a licensed

physician. This supervision may be by personal contact or indirect contact by telephone or radio. The physician at all times is responsible both professionally and legally for the care and treatment of his patient.

### South Dakota Lists Duties

The South Dakota Physician's Assistant Law is unique among similar legislation in other states in that it specifically lists the duties an assistant may perform after the completion of adequate training and proficiency testing. The consumer can be assured, because of this section of the law, that the assistant is qualified to provide any one of the medical services listed.

### Specific Medical Services

What medical services will a physician's assistant be qualified to provide? The following list, in non-medical terms, is not a complete list of the services a physician's assistant may administer but will provide some insight into the level of services consumers can expect.

He may give physical examinations, draw and examine blood samples, read skin tests, take EKG tracings, prescribe treatment for symptoms and treatment for temporary pain relief, treat common childhood diseases, administer injections and immunizations, clean and suture superficial wounds, treat burns, strap, cast and split sprains and remove casts; and apply traction.

The physician's assistant may also assist the primary care physician

through well-baby and well-child clinics, pre- and post-natal surveillance to include clinic and home visits. The assistant may institute emergency measures and emergency treatment in situations such as cardiac arrest, shock, hemorrhage, convulsions, poisonings and emergency obstetric delivery.

In addition, the physician's assistant may accompany the physician on his hospital rounds and record patient progress, assist in surgery and keep such records as the physician may require, including birth and death certificates.

The assistant may operate out-patient facilities in small communities, treat the patients they are qualified to serve and refer the more serious cases to the

primary care physician. The assistant may also make home visits of recuperating patients, and thus reduce the need for lengthy hospitalization.

#### Starting A Local Service

How might a rural community obtain the services of a physician's assistant? The State Board of Medical and Osteopathic Examiners is responsible for the approval of placement of physician's assistants. The primary care physician must make the application and file a copy of the employment contract between the physician and his assistant with the board at the time of application. Therefore communities desiring to obtain the services must work with the physician presently serving the community. The services thus obtained are not a new service but an extension of the present service.

Galen Kelsey, Extension Resource Development Agent

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