

FAQ What does it mean to be a Physician Assistant in a sub-specialized orthopedic practice?

By Brian Walters, PA-C

My name is Brian Walters and I joined Lancaster Orthopedic Group as a Physician Assistant two years ago. I graduated from Penn State University and Penn College of Technology. My past medical experience includes working as a Certified Athletic Trainer for a local, quad-A high school for four years, as well as serving in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard for 15 years as an enlisted medic, and then as a commissioned officer in the Medical Service Corps. Working as an athletic trainer allowed me to fully comprehend body mechanics and the way we move around during everyday activities, which is invaluable to me in the specialty of orthopedics.

My initial orientation period with LOG allowed me to gain significant exposure and valuable insight into general orthopedics as well as other subspecialty areas of orthopedics. The orientation program enabled me to further refine my skills with treating patients during initial triage, hospital rounds, emergency room visits, and responding to orthopedic consults. The physician assistants at LOG subspecialize in different facets of orthopedics, just as the physicians do. The reason we subspecialize is so that we can become knowledgeable more quickly in specific areas of orthopedics. After orientation, I began working exclusively with Dr. Alan Tuckman, who specializes in foot and ankle extremities.



Dr. Tuckman has been instrumental in getting me up to speed, if you will, in his area of expertise. When working hand-in-hand with him, I provide assistance with diagnostic and treatment options, as well as preliminary interpretation of diagnostic tests. Once Dr. Tuckman felt I was qualified, he allowed me to progress professionally by focusing on the care of orthopedic post-operative patients. Shortly thereafter, I began having my own office hours once a week and became an extension of his eyes, ears, and hands; assuming the role of the Physician's Assistant in the truest sense of the words.

In my role as an orthopedic subspecialty physician assistant, I see patients that might otherwise have to be placed on a long waiting list before seeing a skilled orthopedic clinician. Having physician assistants in a practice expands the delivery of quality medical care and allows patients to be seen more promptly. My goal for each patient I see is to treat them as though they are a family member, advice given to me by my father who is an operating room RN.

On the days where I have my own clinical hours, an office visit is essentially conducted in the same manner as it would be with Dr. Tuckman; an in-depth physical exam is completed, culminating in a diagnosis or a working differential diagnosis. I then discuss this diagnosis in detail along with available treatment options as per Dr. Tuckman's protocol. In certain situations when surgical options may be called for, I am able to give the patient useful, preliminary information, and initiate the necessary paperwork prior to a formal visit with the orthopedic surgeon. In addition, if the patient's treatment plan involves diagnostic testing, such as, x-rays, MRI, CT scans, labs, etc., I am able to start those wheels in motion without the added delay of

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FAQ – How can I manage osteoarthritis?

By Gary M. Zartman, MD

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis; an estimated 27 million Americans suffer the effects of the disease. It occurs when cartilage within the joint breaks down from wear and tear. Men commonly experience the onset of arthritis before age 50, while women's symptoms usually surface after 50. Early signs of arthritis include pain, stiffness and difficulty moving the knees, hips or shoulders. As arthritis progresses, these symptoms may begin to interfere with everyday activities. Fortunately, most people with osteoarthritis can live active, productive lives despite these limitations. The key is to develop a treatment strategy, often consisting of the following:

Exercise

Research shows that exercise is one of the best treatments for osteoarthritis. Exercise can improve mood and outlook, decrease pain, increase flexibility, strengthen the heart and improve blood flow, maintain weight, and promote general physical fitness.

Weight Management

Osteoarthritis patients who have excess weight or are obese should try to lose weight. Weight loss can reduce stress on weight-bearing joints, limit further injury, and increase mobility. A healthy diet and regular exercise help reduce weight.

Conservative Treatments

People with osteoarthritis may find many "non-drug" ways to relieve pain. Application of heat and cold compression, acupuncture, and massage therapy—although not cures for osteoarthritis—can be very effective tools in managing pain.

Medication

Doctors are able to prescribe a wide range of medicines to eliminate or reduce pain and to improve functioning. When prescribing medication, physicians consider the patient's intensity of pain, potential side effects of the medication, and medical history including other medications the patient is taking.

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FAQ - What does it mean to be a sub-specialized Physician Assistant? *By Lauren Santucci, PA-C*

My name is Lauren Santucci and I am one of the Physician Assistants at Lancaster Orthopedic Group. I graduated from Arcadia University's dual degree program in Physician Assistant Studies and Public Health in May of 2009 and have been working with LOG since then.

My clinical time is split between hands and spine. I primarily work alongside Drs. Peart and Kuntz for hands and I follow the two of them where appropriate and when needed in surgery. I spend one day a week in clinic with Dr. Porter, focusing on the spine, and I also follow him in the OR where possible. This allows me to see the assessment process, resultant surgeries, and the post op process for both areas. I was drawn to these areas of orthopedics due to the complex nature of human anatomy of the hand and spine, and due to the wide variety of both orthopedic and neurological issues that may arise as a result. I particularly enjoy these areas because, as humans, these parts of our bodies are essential to nearly every aspect of everyday life. I also scrub in with Dr. Tymon to assist in knee and shoulder surgery when needed.

While I have gained exposure to nearly all areas of orthopedics over the past year, I have spent the vast majority of my time specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of hand and spine patients. The fact that LOG allows us to specialize in various areas of orthopedics just as the physicians do makes us unique as Physician Assistants. This in-depth knowledge of specific practice areas allows us to more thoroughly and effectively evaluate and treat patients within these areas than Physician Assistants in general orthopedic practice. LOG wants us to become knowledgeable more quickly in specific aspects of orthopedics, which is why we receive specialized training that focuses on particular subspecialty areas. As a result of my training, I feel very comfortable diagnosing and treating a wide variety of conditions, and have recently begun seeing my own hand/upper extremity patients. Working so closely with Drs. Peart and Kuntz allows the patients I see to be examined and treated conservatively, or referred to either of them for possible surgery, more promptly.

Although I spend most of my time in our Granite Run office, my role as an LOG Physician Assistant encompasses much more than seeing patients in the clinic. I start out each morning helping out with morning rounds, seeing hospital patients, both post-operatively and for inpatient consultations. During this process, I work with physicians, nursing staff, physical therapists, patients and family members to coordinate post-operative and/or general orthopedic care. As I mentioned before, I also assist in surgery which has been especially beneficial to me as I am more accurately able to explain surgical procedures, the recovery period, and post-operative expectations to patients. I particularly enjoy helping patients feel educated about their orthopedic conditions, and answering any questions that patients have regarding both conservative and surgical interventions. Following surgery, I help initiate the rehabilitation process, and meet with patients in the office periodically throughout their recovery.

I am very happy in my role as a Physician Assistant at Lancaster Orthopedic Group. My job is both exciting and very fulfilling, and I am looking forward to growing as a member of the LOG treatment team over the upcoming years.

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FAQ - How can I manage osteoarthritis?

Surgery

The science of joint replacement surgery has advanced significantly over the past decade. Through minimally invasive procedures and specialized implant devices, orthopedic surgeons can repair diseased joints with an extraordinary degree of success. For many, surgery is the best option to eliminate the pain and disability of osteoarthritis. While health care professionals can prescribe or recommend treatments to help you manage your arthritis, the real key to living well with the disease lies with the patient. Through an everyday lifelong commitment, you too can live well and enjoy good health in spite of osteoarthritis.

Wayne R. Conrad, M.D.
J. Paul Lyet, M.D.
Timothy P. Tymon, M.D.
Raymond E. Peart, M.D.
I. Stanley Porter, M.D.
Gary M. Zartman, M.D.
Mark K. Perezous, M.D.
David G. Kuntz, Jr., M.D.
Gregg J. Fasulo, M.D.
Alan S. Tuckman, M.D.
Joy L. Long, M.D.
Brian J. Keener, M.D.



231 Granite Run Drive
Lancaster • 560.4200
Physical Therapy: 735.3600

175 Martin Avenue, Suite 315
Ephrata • 733.9200
Physical Therapy: 721.9201

1009 East Main Street
Mount Joy • 653-2200

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physician consultation. If other services are required, such as physical therapy, casting, or even a referral to another medical specialty, I also have the ability initiate these service requests. In those cases where the patient requires the immediate attention of the physician, or when conservative treatments are exhausted without satisfactory results, Dr. Tuckman will receive those referrals without undue postponement.

We have a wonderful staff here at LOG, where we share an unwavering commitment in making the patient and their family members the centerpiece of our medical practice. As a mid-level care provider, I am pleased with the opportunity to help patients understand and participate in their treatment options in a professional and expeditious manner; qualities, that I believe, in a patient population that becomes increasingly educated, and more demanding, will be well appreciated by those who experience the quality and caring atmosphere championed by the entire staff at LOG.

Although a day in the life of a Physician's Assistant can be challenging, and demanding, I wouldn't have it any other way. I truly love my job at LOG and I hope to continue my role as a valuable, contributing member of a team that is committed to making the medical journey of the foot and ankle patient as smooth and satisfying as possible.