

# Physician Assistants Within the Psychiatric Workforce

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## Background

- The number of adults with mental illness has been continuously increasing with estimates showing that over 46 million Americans suffer from mental health disorders
- Physician assistants (PAs) are utilized in a myriad of healthcare settings and have historically played a key role in helping to alleviate physician shortages
- Given the significant projected psychiatrist deficits to occur by 2024, it is critical to better understand the evolving role of PAs in psychiatric care
- However, few studies have explored the role of PAs in mental healthcare

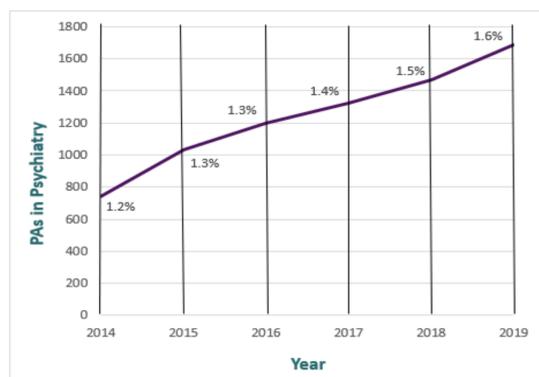
## Objective & Method

- To address the limited literature, a descriptive study of PAs in psychiatry was conducted
- Data were derived from National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) *PA Professional Profile, My Practice Module*
- We describe the growth of PAs in psychiatry from 2014 to 2019, geographic distribution and demographic as well as practice characteristics
- By the end of 2019, 1,684 certified PAs had self-identified as working in psychiatry, representing 1.6% of certified PAs
- Analysis of the data consisted primarily of descriptive statistics conducted using SPSS

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## Findings

### Growth of Certified PAs in Psychiatry

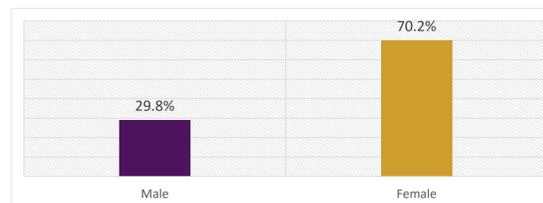


The proportion of PAs working in psychiatry has grown from 1.2% in 2014, to 1.6% by the end of 2019. Of note, the proportion of PAs working in psychiatry has grown by over 30% since 2014, while the absolute number of PAs working in psychiatry has increased by 127.6%.

### Practice Characteristics of Certified PAs in Psychiatry

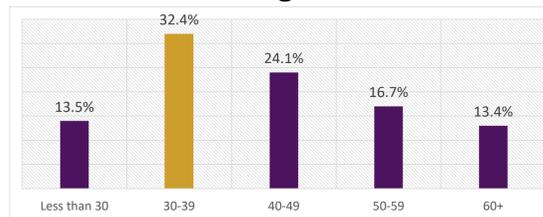
- Most (81.1%) are white, 5.9% are African American, 5.2% are Asian, 3.4% are multiple race and 4.4% other
- 6.7% identify as Hispanic
- The median number of hours worked, and patients seen each week is 40 and 60, respectively.
- 7.8% plan to retire in the next five years
- 19.7% communicate with patients in a language other than English

### Gender



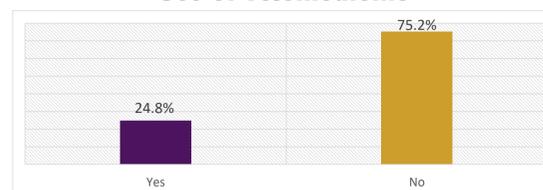
The PA psychiatry workforce is composed of 70.2% females.

### Age



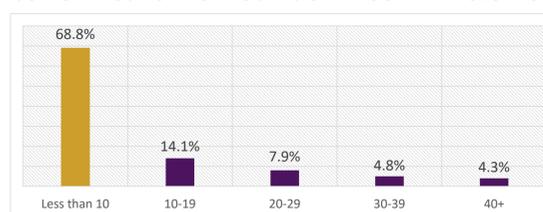
Over 30% of PAs in psychiatry are older than 49 years old, with a median age of 41 years and a mean of 43.2 years.

### Use of Telemedicine



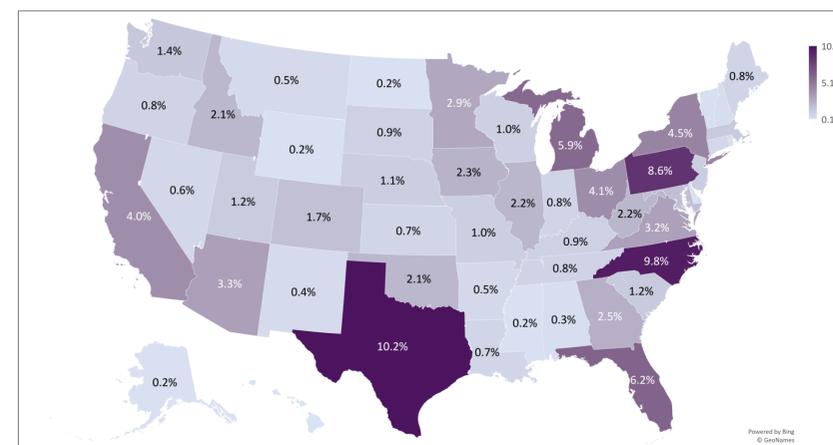
24.8% of PAs in psychiatry participate in telemedicine.

### Number of Hours Worked Each Week in Telemedicine



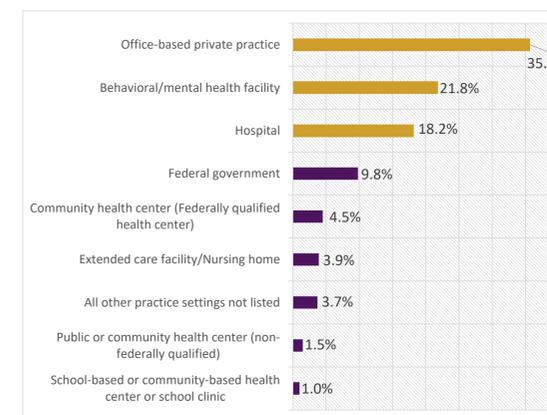
68.8% of PAs in psychiatry who participate in telemedicine, do so less than 10 hours per week

### Geographic Distribution of Certified PAs in Psychiatry



The five states with the largest number of PAs in psychiatry are – TX (10.2%), NC (9.8%), PA (8.6%), FL (6.2%), and MI (5.9%).

### Practice Setting



35.7% of PAs who work in psychiatry identify their primary location of employment as office-based private practice. 21.8% are employed at behavioral/mental health facilities and 18.2% work in hospitals.

## Conclusions

- The US faces an urgent need to address mental illness by improving access to high quality and affordable care
- Understanding the PA characteristics and employment settings is an important foundation in how this profession is contributing to medical labor supply and demand forces
- The workforce of PAs in psychiatry is growing at a steady rate and represents a needed resource in American mental healthcare
- The majority of PAs working in psychiatry are in office-based private practice and behavioral/mental health facilities
- Because of the broad-based medical training, PAs are ideally situated to help with the increasing shortage of psychiatrists
- As the shortage of psychiatrists continues, the relative growth of PAs in psychiatric medicine may be an overlooked strategy for continued access to mental healthcare for the US population

## References

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