

INTRODUCTION

Clinical leadership is essential to ensure safe care, positive patient outcomes, job satisfaction and overall effectiveness of the healthcare system (Daly et. al 2014, Hobbs 2013, Casey 2011). Who fills that role is not always so well defined. With physicians facing administrative burnout, and expansion of healthcare systems presenting new challenges, where do Physician Assistants serve best? A study at Emory Healthcare Network in Georgia found that when they utilized advanced practice providers, such as PAs, in leadership positions and provided them clinical leadership training, there were improvements in patient encounters, employee engagement and even revenue.(Proulx et. al 202)

Unfortunately, there is limited research on both the presence and the influence of physician assistants in leadership roles. Without quantitative, national data on PAs in administrative roles, it is difficult to evaluate the possible benefits like the ones found by Emory.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, researchers worked to gather quantitative data about the presence of PAs on hospital administrative boards in Kentucky. Secondly, data was gathered to explore current Kentucky PA student's interest in holding a leadership role on a hospital board.

METHODS

I. Hospital Data Collection

Researchers analyzed the number of Physician Assistants on the hospital board of each hospital in the State of Kentucky. The list of 106 Kentucky hospitals was accessed via the American Hospital Directory. Data collected is summarized in Fig. 2.

II. Survey Data Collection

An anonymous survey was created by researchers, approved by UK IRB (IRB#74625) and was then sent to Program Directors from the three PA Programs in Kentucky (University of Kentucky, University of Cumberland's, and Sullivan University) along with a letter of approval from a University of Kentucky PA Program Faculty member. Each program was asked to distribute the survey to all PA students currently attending their program as of the spring semester of 2022, both clinical and didactic years. Students were asked to fill out the survey and submit it via Qualtrics platform. The survey questions are contained within Fig.1. Researchers compiled the data and conducted a series of statistical analyses looking for trends in the data.

III. Statistical Analyses

Survey analyses consisted of frequencies, descriptive statistics, and a series of non-parametric tests utilizing SPSS software. In total, seven non-parametric tests were performed to analyze the nominal and ordinal data collected. Three chi-square tests performed to assess differences in individual responses to various Likert-type questions. Additionally, a Rho's Pearson correlation was used to assess correlation between individual responses to each question. Finally, three non-parametric tests were utilized to assess between-group differences (gender, estimated year of graduation, and phase in school). Two Mann-Whitney U tests and a Kruskal-Wallis test was used for these analyses. All non-parametric tests were set to indicate a p-value <.05 as significant.

RESULTS

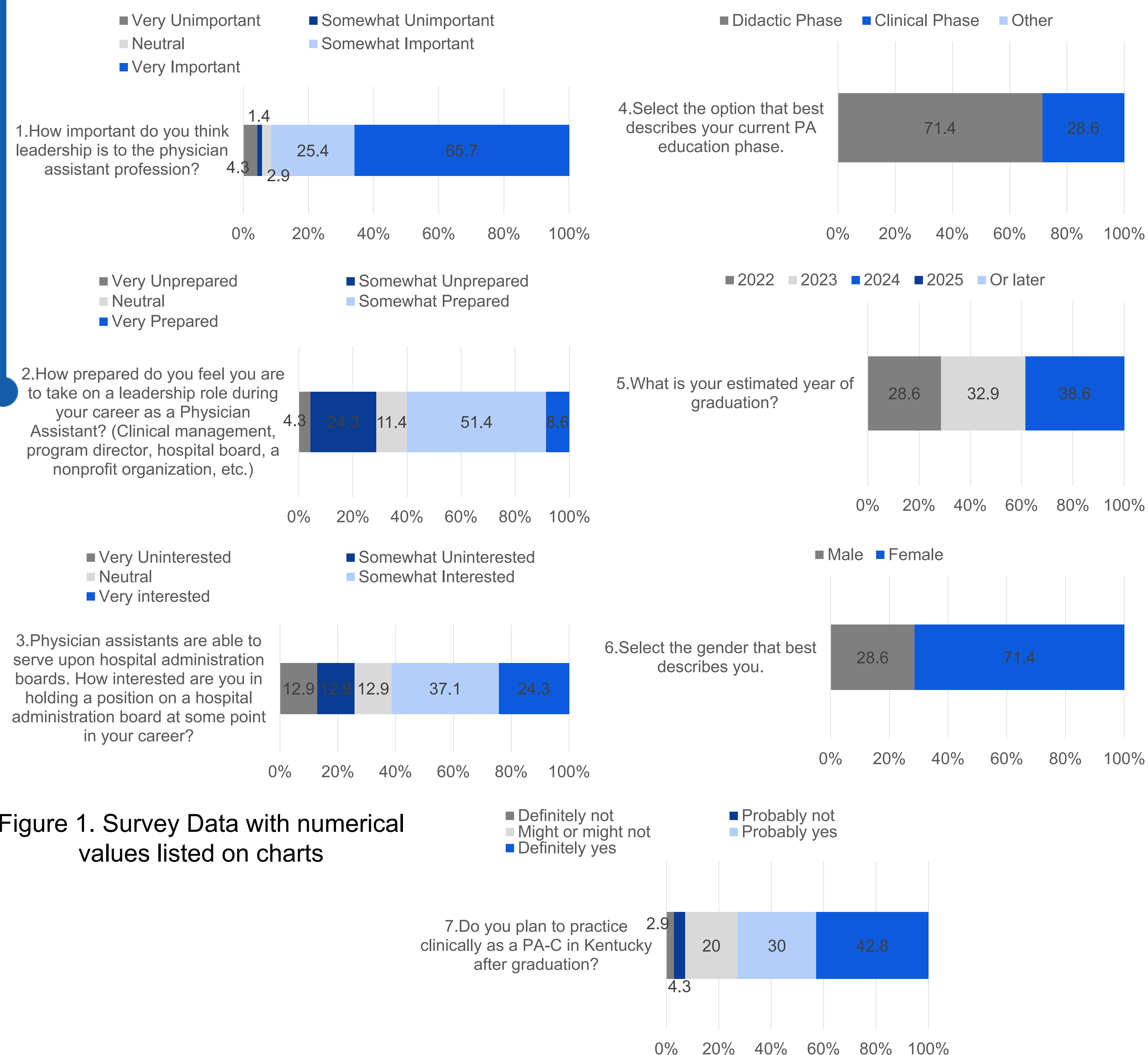


Figure 1. Survey Data with numerical values listed on charts

PA-C ON HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION BOARD

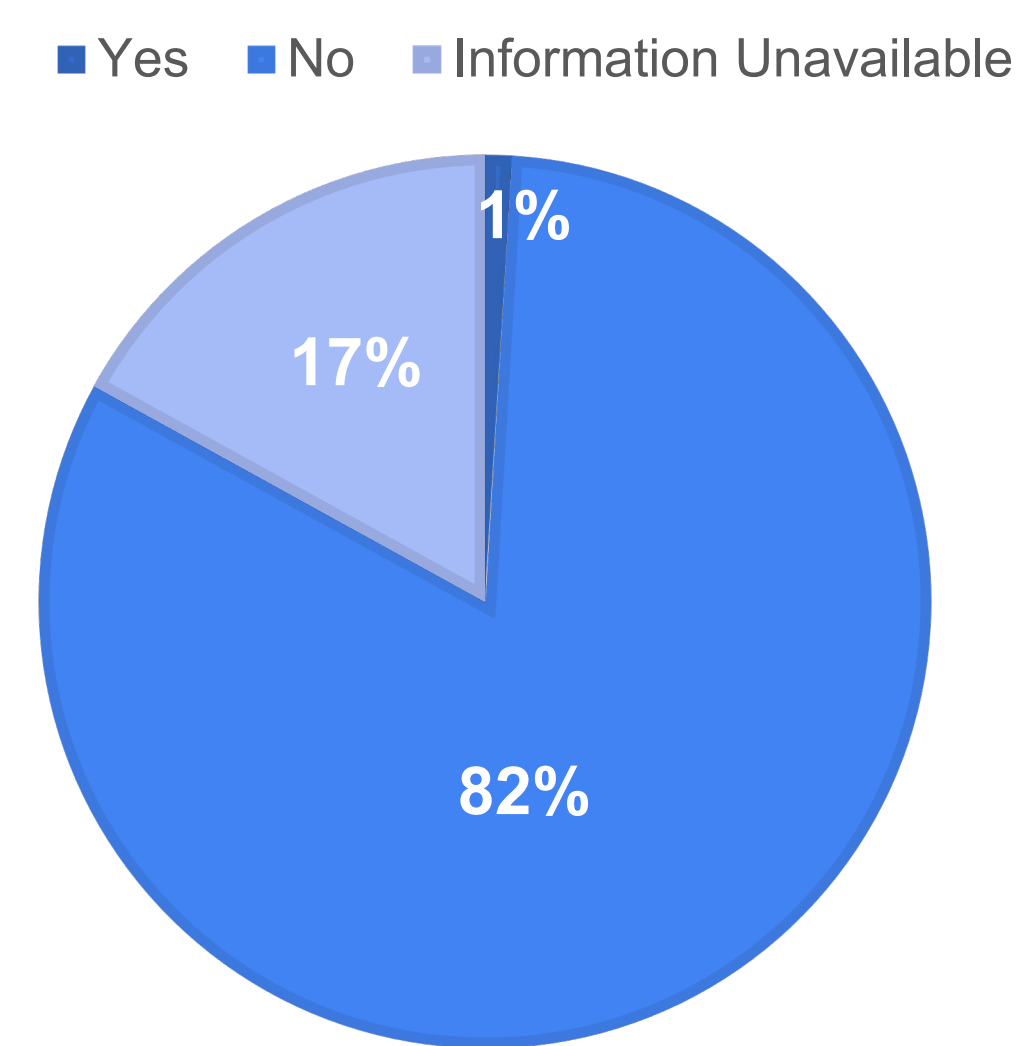


Figure 2. PA-C Hospital Board Data Summary of 106 Kentucky Hospitals

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	0.334	0.11	2.923	.005c

Figure 3. Q2 vs. Q3 Data Significance

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- 75 respondents completed the survey; however, 5 responses were removed due exiting the survey prior to submission (n=70). Descriptive tests were performed to quantify mean responsivity towards interests in leadership, importance of leadership, plans to pursue leadership, and plan to practice in Kentucky. The importance of leadership to the Physician Assistant profession resulted in a mean score of 4.47 ± 0.959 and variance of .919.
- Chi-square tests analyzing Q1 vs Q3, Q2 vs Q3, and Q3 vs Q7 were statistically insignificant.
- Rho's Pearson Correlation resulted in positive linear trend and medium effect size between Q2 vs Q3 ($r(68)=0.305$, $p = 0.005$). (Fig. 3)
- Independent-samples Mann-Whitney U (interest across gender): $U=525.5$, $p = 0.731$.
- Second Mann-Whitney U (interest across phase in school): $U=429.5$, $p = 0.341$.
- Independent-sample Kruskal-Wallis test (interest across est. graduation): $H=2.081$, $p = 0.353$.

DISCUSSION

- The overall responses appeared to display a predominantly positive view of interest, preparedness, and plan to pursue leadership.
- The results of this study showed a statistically significant relationship between the responses for questions 2 and 3 shown on Fig. 3.
- Data shows a positive correlation between students who feel prepared to take on a leadership role and students who have interest in holding a leadership role during their career as a PA. However, based on the research conducted on current hospital administration boards, there are few practicing PAs holding those positions.
- The potential utility for PAs is evident. Further research needs to be done to explore why PAs are not being employed in this way. Based on the survey results, there is an interest in these leadership roles from current PA students in Kentucky.

CONCLUSION

This research question is pioneering the way for future exploration in the Physician Assistant field. More specifically, the current research was conducted in the state of Kentucky to assess attitudes and perceptions of current Physician Assistant students towards leadership in the future. A non-parametric correlation indicated that interest in holding a leadership position was significantly related to preparedness for leadership. While we cannot imply causation for the relationship, it is an interesting and useful relationship worth considering for the future. Furthermore, more research is necessary to properly assess the benefits of Physician Assistants to serving in administrative positions. Possible effects on patient outcomes, patient safety, quality of care, and even revenue have yet to be fully explored.

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