



## OPEN BOARD FORUM

June 28, 2018

Port Alberni, BC

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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**Q.** Can you petition the government to recognize and regulate Physician Assistants (PA)? Given the support from the position statements of many organizations in BC, including the BC chamber of commerce, Doctors of BC and the BC Care Providers Association, it would be beneficial for Island Health to take the lead in getting PAs on the island.

**A.** Thank you for your question. Island Health welcomes suggestions and works closely with the Ministry of Health, BC health authorities, regulatory bodies and various service partners on ways in which we can improve and expand access to health care services.

In 2010 Doctors of BC and the Ministry of Health established a joint committee to inform how Physician Assistants could be introduced into BC's health care system. The University of BC, Justice Institute of BC, and other stakeholders held discussions on development of a joint proposal for a Physician Assistant education program in BC.

In January 2014, the Minister of Health directed Ministry staff to explore the practical considerations for introducing Physician Assistants in BC. A draft concept paper identified and discussed considerations, including practice settings and overlapping roles, an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework, a funding model, employment and labour relations implications, and education and training.

The explorations concluded that the Physician Assistant role overlaps substantially with existing nursing roles, such as nurse practitioners and registered nurses with certified practice credentials, and family physician roles such as hospitalists or surgical assistants. The introduction of a new health provider role requires careful consideration and management in order to understand and address the inevitable team function issues that emerge from overlapping scopes of practice.

At this time, patient and population health care needs are able to be addressed with the skill sets of existing health care professions in BC. There are no known care gaps that can only be addressed by Physician Assistants. The Ministry of Health and BC health authorities, including Island Health, have an obligation to British Columbians to optimize the scopes of practice of existing health care professionals such as nurse practitioners.