

## ADVICE

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**Carilion Health Column**


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By MEGAN MCDONALD  
 Physician's Assistant Student

## A new addition to Franklin County

Over the past few months, you may have seen a new person in a white lab coat, asking to take your blood pressure at the YMCA, or heard a new voice on the local med talk radio show or had your children tell you about a guest speaker in class, talking about healthy habits.

These new additions are physician assistant students from Jefferson College of Health Sciences in Roanoke, who are in the county participating in their community medicine rotation. These students have spent more than a year in the classroom, learning about diseases and treatments, how to perform a physical exam, diagnostic procedures, and many other medical issues. They are currently in their second year of training, seeing patients in the community, medical offices and hospitals.

Physician assistants (PA) are licensed medical providers, who work under the supervision of physicians, but are able to prescribe medicines, diagnosis and treat patients. The profession began in 1965 when the Navy began training corpsman in a more-advanced fashion in order to meet needs during a physician shortage. PAs receive a year of classroom training, a year of clinic training and are required to pass a national exam in order to practice medicine. You may have seen a PA in your family doctor's office, the emergency room or in an operating room when you had surgery. PAs are able to work in any field of medicine, providing care and education to patients.

Jefferson College of Health Sciences was the first college in Virginia to have a PA program. Since beginning the program in 1997, they have graduated 234 students. This year, Franklin County received the benefits of PA students to focus on the health needs in this community. Each month, a PA student helps within the community by seeing patients at the Free Clinic of Franklin County, performing blood pressure screenings and health education at the YMCA, speaking with children at elementary school and afterschool programs, and participating in health promotion with many community organizations.

This month, I have the privilege to do my part in giving back to the community that has given so much to me. I grew up in this county, and I am still a resident here. I am very excited to be able to help my community in various ways. I can speak for the program and say that we are honored to be here and are gracious for your hospitality. We look forward to working together to meet the healthcare needs of those in Franklin County and share in the future of the county.

***For more information on the Physician Assistant Program, visit [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org). For more information on Jefferson College of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Program, log onto [www.jchs.edu](http://www.jchs.edu).***

