



University of Leeds

MSc Physician Associate Studies

CLASSROOM TO CLINIC - Year 2

GENERAL SURGERY TUTOR GUIDE

2025 – 2026

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Introduction

Thank you for your continued involvement with Physician Associate (PA) Students from the University of Leeds. Our students are in the middle of their second year and will undertake three weeks in **General Surgery** as part of a 10-week rotation that includes Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Emergency Medicine, and ENT/Ophthalmology

So far on the programme, each of the PA students has undertaken a 1-year placement at a GP practice. They have also undertaken 3 weeks in a mental health setting and 9 weeks in secondary care (General Medicine, Elderly, Paediatrics, and Acute Medicine) followed by a further 3 weeks in Primary Care. They, therefore, now have a range of clinical skills and knowledge of patient care.

This guide provides an overview of the learning outcomes for students during this placement, suggested activities, and how the placement will be assessed. This is to support you in providing a placement experience that meets the students' learning needs.

Thank you once again for your continued support.

Best Wishes

The Physician Associate Team

Dr Katie Cunningham, Programme Director MSc Physician Associate Studies

Sarah Howarth, Academic lead for Physician Associate Placements

Placement Hours

All physician associate students from the University of Leeds will spend 3 weeks on placement in **General Surgery** during Rotation 3 (Jan – May). Our expectations are that students are timetabled 7.5-8-hour days.

The core placement hours for General Surgery is **90 hours**.

Students are permitted to take 3 study days during this 10-week rotation, if also permitted by the placement supervisor.

General Surgery Learning Outcomes

The purpose of placement in General Surgery is to provide a learning experience for student Physician Associates for them to gain and build on the necessary skills needed to care for surgical patients with a wide range of undifferentiated urgent and non-acute conditions.

The major component of the clinical placement for the student physician associates should involve them participating in the care of patients including the pre-operative assessment, peri-operative and post-operative management of patients in the surgical setting.

Students should attain a level of clinical competence sufficient to allow them to assess, investigate and initiate treatment of the surgical patient, and to communicate appropriately with patients, relatives and other medical professionals.

These are the objectives and intended learning outcomes of the placement and they should be met through clinical experience and wider reading.

By the end of the placement, the PA students should be able to:

Professional Attitudes and Behaviours

- Understand the organisation and running of a surgical ward.
- Gain an understanding of via which routes patient are admitted to acute surgery, how patients are initially assessed and reviewed by a senior decision maker and how decisions are made in terms of diagnosis and management.
- Understand the challenges for patients and clinicians of diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, including how they should be planned, discussed, agreed and delivered while maintaining patient dignity, privacy and safety.

- Understand how these decisions impact on where ongoing management takes place (i.e. within the acute surgical assessment unit, as a day case, as an inpatient etc).
- Understand the role of the PA in general surgery.
- Respect the patient's right to autonomy, privacy and confidentiality (this includes the conscious and unconscious patient).
- Understand the principles behind informed consent and how this can be determined when the patient does not have capacity.
- Understand that consent for the preservation of tissues removed during surgery should be discussed with the patient.
- Understand how clinical systems are used for requesting and interpreting investigations and clinical documentation.
- Understand how imaging and other investigations are requested, having an appreciation for the justification for performing these and the information that should be included when completing a request.
- Consider how updates on progress and management are communicated to patients and their family to ensure that they remain informed and can participate in decisions made about their care.
- Understand processes for making referrals and seeking specialist advice.
- Understand the need for early escalation of care to appropriate seniors/specialties, good communication (including SBARR) and sound teamwork in the management of acutely unwell patients.
- Understand the role of current best evidence and how and where to access clinical guidelines and how these are utilised in clinical decision making.
- Recognise limitations of knowledge and skills and seek help when needed.
- Consider the emotional impacts of scenarios encountered on placement and strategies to manage this, including reflection and debriefing.

Clinical Skills

- Identify the acutely unwell surgical patient using an approach that incorporates clinical assessment and appropriate urgent investigations.
- Have an understanding of the initial resuscitation and stabilisation of an acutely unwell patient.

- Elicit a history from a surgical patient and from information gathered, perform an assessment and physical examination for a range of common urgent presentations.
- Utilise clinical monitoring information in patient assessment – e.g. NEWS/vital signs, urine output, bowel charts, nutrition assessments and operation notes.
- Present a history and/or examination in a succinct and professional manner.
- Use history and examination findings to formulate appropriate differential diagnoses including possible life and/or limb threatening conditions.
- Suggest appropriate investigations to support clinical decision making with an appreciation of the range of investigations available.
- Understand the principles of the optimisation of a patient prior to surgical treatment and how that might differ in elective and emergency setting.
- Gain an understanding of the different modes of anaesthesia (local, regional, general), how these are used in different types of surgery, their risks and benefits and how these impacts on fasting before surgery.
- Understand the normal postoperative course and recognise common post operative complications.
- Explain how investigations and treatments must be prioritised according to clinical urgency.
- Understand the presentations of common surgical conditions including hallmarks of an early cancer diagnosis
- Undertake a risk assessment for VTE and identify appropriate perioperative VTE prophylaxis.

Medicines Management

- Establish an accurate medication history, covering both prescribed and non-prescribed medication, herbal medicines, supplements and recreational drugs.
- Establish and clarify medication allergies and the types of medication interactions that patients experience.
- Understand the importance of peri-operative prophylaxis in reducing the risk of post-operative complications, including thromboprophylaxis and antibiotic prophylaxis.

- Describe the principles of management for common medical conditions in the surgical setting e.g. diabetes, hypertension, COPD, renal failure.
- Understand how to control common post-operative symptoms such as pain and nausea and be aware of the different methods of post-operative analgesia available including regional and PCAS. (PAs are not expected to prescribe)
- Observe and discuss how a clinician makes a decision to and safely prescribes:
 - Oxygen
 - Fluid therapy (fluid challenge vs maintenance therapy)
 - Antibiotic therapy
 - Analgesia

Clinical Procedures

- Demonstrate proper techniques in hand washing
- Understand proper techniques in surgical scrub
- Demonstrate appropriate selection and use of PPE
- Demonstrate aseptic technique
- Perform venepuncture
- Perform peripheral venous cannulation
- Perform and interpret ECGs
- Perform and interpret Arterial and Venous Blood Gases
- Perform and interpret Capillary Blood Glucose
- Perform and interpret Urinalysis
- Perform Urinary Catheterisation
- Perform NEWS score (i.e. performing observations and calculating scores)
- Commence and manage oxygen therapy
- Observe an NG tube insertion
- Obtain a swab eg nasal, wound, throat
- Observe the preparation of an IV injection/infusion
- Observe prescription and monitoring of oxygen, IV fluids and insulin

Knowledge

Teaching on campus has been designed to address the learning outcomes for newly qualified PAs as outlined within the [FPA Physician Associate Curriculum](#). In year 1, students have been taught the theory underlying how core and critical clinical conditions may present, and how a PA would be expected to assess and manage these. In year 2 students are expected to apply and develop this knowledge, recognising that there is often complexity and uncertainty associated with diagnosis and the need for appropriate supervision, support and guidance.

Domain 3 of the [GMC Physician Associate Registration Assessment content map](#) outlines the patient presentations and conditions for which a newly qualified PA could be expected to assess and initiate treatment under appropriate supervision. Students may encounter a range of these presentations and conditions during this placement but should have the opportunity to be involved in the assessment and management of patients presenting with a number of the following:

Surgery	
Presentations	Core conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● abdominal distention/mass ● abdominal pain ● anal pain ● breast lump ● change in bowel habit ● dysphagia ● haematuria ● jaundice (dark urine, pale stools) ● lumps in the groin ● nipple discharge ● painful, cold limb ● per rectum bleeding ● rectal prolapse ● wound discharge ● weight loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● appendicitis ● benign breast disease (abscess, infection, cysts) ● biliary disease ● bowel obstruction ● breast malignancy ● diverticulitis ● gastrointestinal malignancy ● hernia ● pancreatitis ● peri-anal disease ● peritonitis
	Uncommon but critical conditions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● aortic aneurysm / dissection ● bowel ischaemia ● ischaemic limb ● intussusception ● major haemorrhage

Suggested Activities

Students should be provided and timetabled opportunities that enable them to develop the attitudes and behaviours, clinical skills, treatment/medication knowledge and clinical knowledge listed above.

Students are also strongly encouraged to seek out their own learning opportunities. Some specific suggested activities include:

- Observation of triage and initial assessment process of acute surgical patient
- Clerk in a newly admitted patient under supervision.
- Document a clerking in the patient notes – to be reviewed and countersigned by a clinician.
- Observe a list in the operating theatre and have the opportunity to observe a healthcare professional performing surgical scrub and surgical procedure.
- Observe the roles of different healthcare professionals such as anaesthetists and nursing staff in the pre-operative, perioperative and post operative recovery of a patient undergoing surgery.
- Attend morning handover and discuss how the approach taken supports patient safety.
- Engage in a ward round and observe a comprehensive surgical assessment.
- Observe a clinical case conference or audit meeting
- Shadow a PA during their shift to understand how they work and interact with other members of the team and how they manage their time and workload.

Please note this list is not meant to be exhaustive, neither to negate the importance of many other patient presentations.

Essential Components

1. INDUCTION

➤ Administrative

At the start of the placement there will be an administrative induction including the following:

- Patient confidentiality

- Access to IT facilities, and rules regarding appropriate use of PCs/internet
- Student and placement liability, and requirements for appropriate supervision of procedures
- Placement health and safety procedures and risk assessment
- Personal health, social, cultural or religious requirements of the students
- Arrangements for communication in case of sickness or other absences, or emergencies
- Who's who!

➤ **Clinical**

There should also be a clinical induction to clarify aims and objectives, proposed learning timetable and clarification of assessment requirements.

There should also be a clinical induction to:

- clarify aims and objectives;
- discuss the proposed learning timetable;
- clarify assessment requirements;
- clarify who the overall educational supervisor is and who is responsible for clinical supervision each day.

➤ **Attendance**

Students complete a weekly timesheet that is uploaded to their portfolio. These are reviewed by the university at the end of each term. These timesheets also need to be reviewed by the clinical supervisor at the end of the placement (see below).

Please note students are told: *Attendance is one of the key professional attributes. We expect students to attend 100% of the sessions on the course as a mark of respect for their colleagues, staff and particularly patients.*

If they are absent while on a clinical placement, students should contact the relevant person at the placement and pastudies@leeds.ac.uk to indicate how long they expect to be absent. It is expected that they make any missed days up. If this is not possible, they must contact the PA team to decide next steps.

2. ASSESSMENT

Professional Portfolio

To prepare PA students for maintaining a portfolio of attainment post-qualification, we have reviewed the workplace-based assessments that students are asked to complete with their supervisors whilst on placement. These have been designed to allow students to demonstrate their development over the course of their studies.

While we are still using PebblePad as the online platform, you will notice some changes to both the requirements and templates. Students are required to complete

assessments every term and these are categorised into Direct Observation of Practical Skills (DOPS), MiniCEX, Case Based Discussions and Reflections. These assessments should be reviewed along with the student's attendance record when completing the Assessment of Progress form. There are set requirements for how many and which WBAs should be completed throughout the year. This is outlined in *Workplace-based assessments: Expectations of a Year 2 physician associate student*, which can be found [here](#).

➤ **Direct Observation of Practical Skills (DOPS; completed with any suitably qualified healthcare professional)**

Students should have opportunities to be assessed and receive feedback on a range of practical skills (eg venepuncture, intravenous cannulation). They will have received training on campus on how to perform these procedures prior to undertaking them on placement. The DOPS assessment tool is designed to evaluate the student's performance in undertaking the selected practical procedure, against a structured checklist. The assessor can be any healthcare professional who is qualified to perform this procedure.

You will be required to give your overall assessment as to what level of supervision you assess the student as being competent to perform this procedure at:

Level 1 – Observation only

Level 2 – Able to perform under direct supervision

Level 3 – Able to perform under indirect supervision

For more information on DOPS (what they are and what level they should be undertaken at), please see *Workplace-based assessments: Expectations of a Year 2 physician associate student*, which can be found [here](#).

➤ **Mini-CEX (completed with any suitably qualified healthcare professional)**

A Mini-Clinical Evaluation Exercise (MiniCEX) is an observed, real-life interaction between the student and a patient. Through observing the interaction, students should be assessed on a number of aspects of the encounter – these will vary according to the MiniCEX chosen and their stage of training but may include history taking skills, physical examination, diagnostic skills, communication and listening skills etc.

For more information on MiniCEX (what they are and what level they should be undertaken at), please see *Workplace-based assessments: Expectations of a Year 2 physician associate student*, which can be found [here](#).

➤ **Case Based Discussion (completed with any suitably qualified healthcare professional)**

Case Based Discussions are used to evidence and demonstrate a student's understanding of the assessment and management of a patient and to provide feedback on their clinical reasoning, decision making and the application of medical knowledge in relation to patient care. It also serves as a method to document

conversations about and presentations of cases by the student. These may be consultations that they have observed rather than led.

For more information on Case Based Discussions (what they are and what level they should be undertaken at), please see *Workplace-based assessments: Expectations of a Year 2 physician associate student*, which can be found [here](#).

➤ **Reflections**

Students are required to complete a reflection at least once per term. These require the student to reflect on an event that took place in a clinical setting, thinking about the impact that this had on patients and colleagues and a focus on what the student has learnt from this experience.

These are not assessed but we would encourage review and discussion of the student's reflection during the end of term meeting with their supervisor.

➤ **Assessment of Progress Form (completed in person with the educational supervisor)**

A meeting should be scheduled with the student's educational supervisor at the end of every placement block in order to review progress and whether the objectives for the placement have been met (DOPS, MiniCEX, Case Based Discussions, Reflections, attendance should be reviewed). The Assessment of Progress form should be completed to document and evidence what was discussed in the meeting and a personal development plan should be co-created to address any learning needs.

If you would like to discuss problems related to a particular student identified during this meeting, please contact Sarah Howarth (s.d.howarth@leeds.ac.uk).

3. EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

➤ **Placement evaluation form**

We collect feedback from students after each placement and use it carefully to improve aspects of the PA Studies curriculum and placements. A feedback report is provided in January and August to the Trust.

➤ **Clinical Placement Reporting Tool**

The Clinical Placement Reporting Tool allows staff and students to inform the School about the positive experiences that they've had as well as highlight any problems or issues that they may have encountered.

Staff and students have two options after accessing the Tool – 'leave a commendation' and 'raise a concern'. Commendations are intended to recognise individuals that have made significant contributions to a placement experience through their outstanding teaching, professionalism, or attitude. Both students and

staff can submit feedback for one another, and the named individual will be sent the feedback instantly if an email address is provided.

Concerns should be raised if a staff member or student has engaged in behaviour that has either contributed negatively to the placement experience or falls short of the professional standards expected of their role. This includes harassment, bullying and discrimination, as well as any other behaviour that might jeopardise the delivery of safe and equitable healthcare or a supportive and effective learning environment. The School will work with individuals who submit a concern to ensure that issues are fully-investigated and action taken where appropriate.

The placement provider version of the Tool and further information can be found [here](#).

Please remember if you would like to discuss an issue that arises concerning a student (good or bad), the PA team are always happy for you to send an email or call to discuss it further.

Relevant Contacts

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Email k.cunningham@leeds.ac.uk

Sarah Howarth

Academic Lead for Physician Associate Placements

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Additional Resources

Additional resources can be found [here](#). Such as:

- Advice on contamination incidents & needlesticks
- Physician Associate Professionalism statement
- PA student drug formulary
- Workplace-based assessments: Expectations of a Year 2 physician associate student
- Curriculum Map covering both years of the programme