

Plan Time Away and Return to Practice

Advice for PAs Who Want to Take a Practice Hiatus

By Jennifer Anne Hohman

Career navigation is most effective when empowered by knowledge, choice, and preparation. In this article I'll share insights and advice from consultations with PAs who are taking a break from practice and returning to it. This is a very common pattern in the PA career cycle and I hope to dispel some of the anxiety and angst that many feel before taking a break and then returning. Planning and preparation can make all the difference in how smooth or how challenging the resumption of PA practice will be.

Planning Your Break: Issues to Consider

When planning a break from full-time practice, carefully review your contract. How much notice does your employer require? Do you have a non-compete in your employment agreement? If so, how will it affect your part-time employment or professional options during your break? This is also an appropriate time to request letters of recommendation from colleagues to keep on file, while the details of your work together are still fresh.

Knowing the details of your state medical board's reentry requirements is the most important aspect of returning to practice more easily. Two years is in many – but not all – states the maximum length of time a PA can be away from practice without being required to complete a formal reentry process. There is no single, nationwide reentry process but rather a patchwork of state requirements: some states only require maintenance of NCCPA certification while others mandate completion of a reentry program specifically aimed at PAs. Keeping your certification current and CMEs up to date is advisable for **all** PAs not in full-time practice.

AAPA is here to support you in each stage of your PA career! Here are resources of special interest to those taking a break or reentering full-time practice:

Update your professional file

Make sure your NCCPA certification is current and you have copies of all documentation. AAPA can help you stay organized with [PA Portfolio](#).

Refresh your knowledge

Take courses to keep your knowledge current, and be sure to attend CMEs and read industry journals. Find an array of CME in [AAPA's Learning Central](#).

Test your skills

You can undergo an objective clinical assessment to verify whether you are ready for clinical practice. Contact [AAPA's Advocacy staff](#) for information about programs near you.

Review the law

Be sure to read about the [laws and regulations that govern PAs in your state](#). Changes in law can happen quickly; do not assume that regulations have remained the same since you left practice.

Make Your Break Personally and Professionally Productive

Making part-time clinical work part of your break is a smart strategy—whether in a volunteer position, working a few hours a week for an employer, or on a per-diem basis. Not only will this help keep your license active, staying connected to your PA-clinician identity while away from full-time practice is beneficial both personally and professionally. Many clients who have stopped clinical work altogether miss their PA role keenly and are eager (and anxious) to regain their sense of professional identity and purpose. It's wise to keep a hand in PA practice even in a limited way during your break.

Other ways to keep your PA identity alive include maintaining memberships in professional societies (AAPA, state organizations, specialty practice groups) and attending occasional meetings. Keeping up with your CME by attending educational events is a terrific way to stay current and network with your peers. Volunteering is an option, too—it will keep you engaged in the practice of medicine and prevent patient-care gaps in your resume. If you plan to return to practice with your previous full-time employer, periodic visits with colleagues will help you feel connected and ease your return to the team.

I also suggest using this period to assess your PA career path and reflect on how it can be made more rewarding, sustainable, and reflective of your mission in medicine. (I offer a Career Self-Assessment resource to interested PAs: please contact me at jennifer@pacareercoach.net for a free copy.)

Return to Practice, Reignite Your Career

Many PAs express both excitement and anxiety at the prospect of returning to practice, which is highly understandable. I'm struck by how isolated and self-critical many feel as they transition back to practice, as if they have somehow made an error or were the only ones to take this journey. I hope that as the culture of medicine evolves to reflect its providers and a more work/life supportive philosophy, that this transition becomes recognized by Boards and employers as a routine rather than anomalous aspect of the PA career experience. Until then, here are a few tips for a successful return to full time practice:

- Be sure to update your CV with activities including part-time and per-diem employment, volunteering, and add any new references acquired during this time to your list. Same for LinkedIn.
- When negotiating a new contract, be prepared with salary targets and push back against attempts to low-ball your compensation. It's time to change a culture that makes returning providers feel penalized or devalued.
- Negotiate a new contract that will support sustainable work/life balance after your return to full-time practice.

- Search for a job that will allow you to grow and continue your PA career journey in a way that truly excites you.
- As proposed in this article, find ways to keep your CME and license active, and hopefully practice medicine on a part time basis during your break.
- Be part of the cultural change that recognizes clinicians as people with lives and obligations outside of work, and advocate for a more humane culture of medicine where work and life balance are integrated into policy and practice.

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