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Summit Offers Recommendations to Strengthen PA Involvement in Mental Health

Johns Creek, GA, November 1, 2017 – Recommendations have been published from the nccPA Health Foundation’s recent PArtners in Mental Health Summit, designed to engage and equip all PAs to provide greater access to care for patients’ mental health and substance use disorders.

The summit included representatives from physician assistant (PA) organizations, PAs practicing in psychiatry and other disciplines, interprofessional advocates and mental health experts.

The recommendations are:

- **Enhance PA educational approaches in mental health.**
 - Broaden mental health curricula in PA programs and other educational pathways
 - Seek partners to help develop competencies for mental health across PA roles
 - Foster mental health competencies through standards related to the accreditation of PA programs and content of the PA certification exam consistent with relevant practice data.
- **Strengthen the PA practice environment to address mental health needs and foster integration.** Promote research and data gathering on PA practice activities in mental health across disciplines, identify ways to modify regulatory barriers, and enhance PA reimbursement provisions.
- **Foster national campaigns to raise the profile of PAs addressing mental health across disciplines.** Use PA organizations’ communication channels to publicize PA activities in the delivery of mental health services.
- **Create an organizational structure that supports this movement.** Establish strategic alliances and partnerships, communications plans, and a sustainable financial base to support activities.

“This meeting and these recommendations are the first steps to identifying strategic and innovative ways to further integrate PAs in the delivery of mental health services,” said Ted Wendel, Ph.D., chair of the board of the nccPA Health Foundation, organizer of the summit. “The shared goal of those participating is to enable the PA community to make an exponential difference in this complex, national problem. By

leveraging the capacity of PAs and partners to meet mental and behavioral health needs, we hope to improve overall health.”

The PArtners in Mental Health Summit sparked dialogue on the national challenge of mental illness and substance use disorder, anticipated changes in the health system, barriers to care, and unique ways PAs are positioned to help address growing mental health needs.

Today mental health providers are needed more than ever. Over 42 million adults suffer from a mental health problem, and more than 6 million children suffer from an emotional, behavioral or developmental problem. However, a scarcity of providers limits access to mental health care.

PAs are medical providers who can ease provider shortages and are uniquely equipped to provide care and coordination for medical and mental disorders across practice settings. Currently, 1.3 percent of Certified PAs work in psychiatry, but more PAs are expected to enter the medical specialty as demand grows and information campaigns reach all PAs and their healthcare partners.

The full PArtners in Mental Health Summit: Proceedings and Recommendations can be viewed [here](#).

About the NCCPA and the nccPA Health Foundation

The [National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants \(NCCPA\)](#) is the only certifying organization for PAs in the United States. The PA-C credential is awarded by NCCPA to PAs who fulfill certification, certification maintenance and recertification requirements. There are more than 115,500 Certified PAs in the U.S. today.

The [nccPA Health Foundation](#) is a supporting organization of NCCPA. The nccPA Health Foundation is a charitable organization whose mission is to advance the role of Certified PAs to improve health. The Foundation is focused on building PA workforce capacity in the areas of mental health and oral health as part of overall health. It also funds grants to equip and encourage Certified PAs and PA students to promote more equitable care.