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The study, “Growth and Change in the Physician Assistant Workforce in the United States, 1967–2000,” not only charts the relatively meteoric rise in the position’s popularity but also challenges some of the early stereotypes about who seeks out PA positions, where they work, and the profession’s long-term sustainability.

For example, the study shows that the number of PA program graduates grew from 282 in 1972 to nearly 4,000 by the year 2000, despite strong and even hostile opposition to the position in the formative years, the authors note. The data also show that despite almost exclusively male graduating classes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, 67% of 2000 graduates were women. Early conceptions that the position would work primarily in rural environments also proved to be untrue; between 1980 and 2000, the PA population was “fairly evenly distributed,” the study says.

Despite the dearth of information regarding the growth of the PA position in the past four decades, the study authors write that there are many important aspects of the PA profession yet to be thoroughly explored, including:

- The number of PAs and PA programs the work force can sustain
- Specialty roles for PAs
- Long-term effects of women’s increased role in the profession
- Changing academic requirements

To read the study, visit: www.asaht.org/pdf/JAH_34%203%20121_Larson.pdf.