

Innovative Pathways for Advanced Practice Provider Growth: The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center Ascend Program

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Abstract

Purpose: An advanced practice provider (APP) career advancement pathway was developed to promote clinical excellence, enhance job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and improve retention at a major metropolitan National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center. **Data Sources:** A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the PubMed electronic database. **Conclusions:** The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) Advance Model, MSK's APP Career Advancement Pathway of Excellence Theoretical Model, was established by integrating principles and tenants from the Strong Model of Advanced Practice Nursing and Benner's Novice to Expert model. It comprises seven domains of scholarly engagement: direct comprehensive care, research, drivers of change, education, publications and professional leadership, technology and innovation, and mentorship. The model serves as the foundation for the formal career pathway program known as the MSK Ascend Program. The MSK Ascend Program recognizes and honors APP engagement in professional development, establishes a structured pathway for recognition and promotion, and provides a foundation for the continuous development and advancement of APP practice at MSK. **Implications:** Leadership support and commitment are critical to the successful implementation and sustainability of the Ascend Program. This commitment continues to drive professional growth and satisfaction among APPs. The development and iterative refinement of the program exemplify adaptability and an enduring dedication to advancing the MSK APP community.

The growing number of advanced practice providers (APPs) in health care has highlighted the need for institutions to create opportunities for the advancement, growth, and development of APPs (Arthur et al., 2020; Scholtz et al., 2022). The implementation of a career advancement program has been shown to provide opportunities for professional development, improve and standardize clinical practice, increase job satisfaction, decrease turnover, and improve retention of APPs (Coleman & Desai, 2019; Slagle et al., 2023).

Recognizing these needs, in May 2018, a seasoned group of APPs formed a committee to develop an APP career pathway at a major metropolitan National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated comprehensive cancer center. This effort resulted in the creation of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) Advance Model, a theoretical framework supporting the APP Ascend Program, a career advancement pathway at the MSK. Implementation of the career pathway was initiated to recognize and reward APP professional development, clinical expertise, competence, proficiency, engagement, and quality improvement.

The Ascend Program features a four-tiered advancement structure with over 70 enrichment steps spanning seven domains, enabling APPs to achieve promotion through measurable milestones. Applications are reviewed by a peer-reviewed board, with final approval granted by executive leadership. The Ascend Program highlights APP engagement in professional development, creates a formal pathway for promotion and recognition, and establishes a foundation for the development and advancement of ongoing APP practice.

Health-care organizations have recognized the need for professional development opportunities for APPs and developed clinical pathway programs (Evans et al., 2019; McComiskey et al., 2018; Paplanus et al., 2014; Scholtz et al., 2022; Slagle et al., 2023). Critical components of these programs include clinical practice, leadership, professionalism, and scholarship (Scholtz et al., 2022). A study based on Misener's work (Faris et al., 2010) determined certified registered nurse practitioners were most satisfied with their benefits and autonomy and least satisfied with their opportunities for professional growth and the level of intra-

practice partnership and collegiality. Similarly, a study by Essary and colleagues (2018) found that leadership skills correlated with decreased symptoms of burnout and increased job satisfaction in physician assistants (PAs). The study also found that engaging PAs in work-related decisions and recognizing value in their full range of clinical contributions was correlated with increased job satisfaction, decreased symptoms of burnout, and lower attrition.

Developing and implementing a career pathway requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that includes careful planning, obtaining stakeholder buy-in, conducting an organizational analysis that reviews retention rates and job satisfaction, executing the implementation and rollout, and performing ongoing evaluation and review. At its core, a well-structured career pathway fosters professional growth, enhances job satisfaction, and improves retention rates (Ahn & Choi, 2023; Coleman & Desai, 2019). The MSK Ascend Program embodies these principles, creating a lasting impact on APP career trajectories and professional practice.

BACKGROUND

Advanced practice providers play a critical role in health care, helping to meet the increasing demand for high-quality patient care, practicing autonomously, enhancing coordination of care, and serving as a critical link between patients, families, and multidisciplinary health-care teams (Kidd et al., 2023; McGrath et al., 2022; Schlak et al., 2022). Their advanced training and expertise enable them to diagnose, treat, and manage patient conditions, often practicing with a significant degree of autonomy.

Institutions are challenged to solicit innovative ways to retain and recruit valuable APPs. Integral components to the recruitment and retention of talented APPs include ensuring job satisfaction, enhancing professional growth, and promoting evidence-based practice (Arthur et al., 2020; Linzer et al., 2022). Health-care literature suggests that institutional implementation of a career pathway may facilitate the delivery of these necessary measures for APP retention, recognize and advance the professional growth of APPs, promote and reward clinical excellence, enhance job satisfaction,

and improve retention and recruitment (Arthur et al., 2020; Kauffman et al., 2021).

In 2018, APP staff at MSK identified a need for a more equitable promotional program and presented their findings to APP leadership. At the time, only nurse practitioners (NPs) who met specific eligibility requirements could apply for an annual bonus through the Nursing Career Advancement and Recognition of Excellence (N-Care) program. Physician assistants were excluded from applying via the nurse-driven promotional program. This created an imbalance in promotional opportunities, highlighting the necessity for a program to equitably acknowledge the contributions of both NPs and PAs. A decision was made to form an APP-led council, the APP Professional Development Council (PDC), which was tasked with the development of an APP career pathway program. The group created a structured framework to support the professional growth and development of APPs, ensuring clear career progression opportunities within the organization. The aim was to assist APPs in advancing their careers, fostering retention, and aligning their contributions with the organization's mission, vision, and values (Appendix A).

The APP PDC, co-led by one NP, one PA, and 16 members, worked collaboratively to design a comprehensive program addressing the needs of APPs at various stages in their clinical careers. Within the council, subcommittees were formed to distribute the work of developing pathway components. The subcommittees included literature review, theoretical modeling, compensation, mentoring, and tier development (Figure 1).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature subcommittee searched the electronic database, PubMed, using the terms “professional development” OR “clinical ladder” OR “clinical pathway” AND “advanced practice providers” OR “nurse practitioner” OR “physician assistant.” Eight manuscripts were identified. The articles were reviewed by individual group members, and a matrix was created. The matrix comprised the theoretical foundation, study aims, study design, study location, results, conclusions, and any implications for practice. From this matrix, a summary was compiled outlining common themes, theory application, and overall structure informing the proposal (Table 1). Findings from

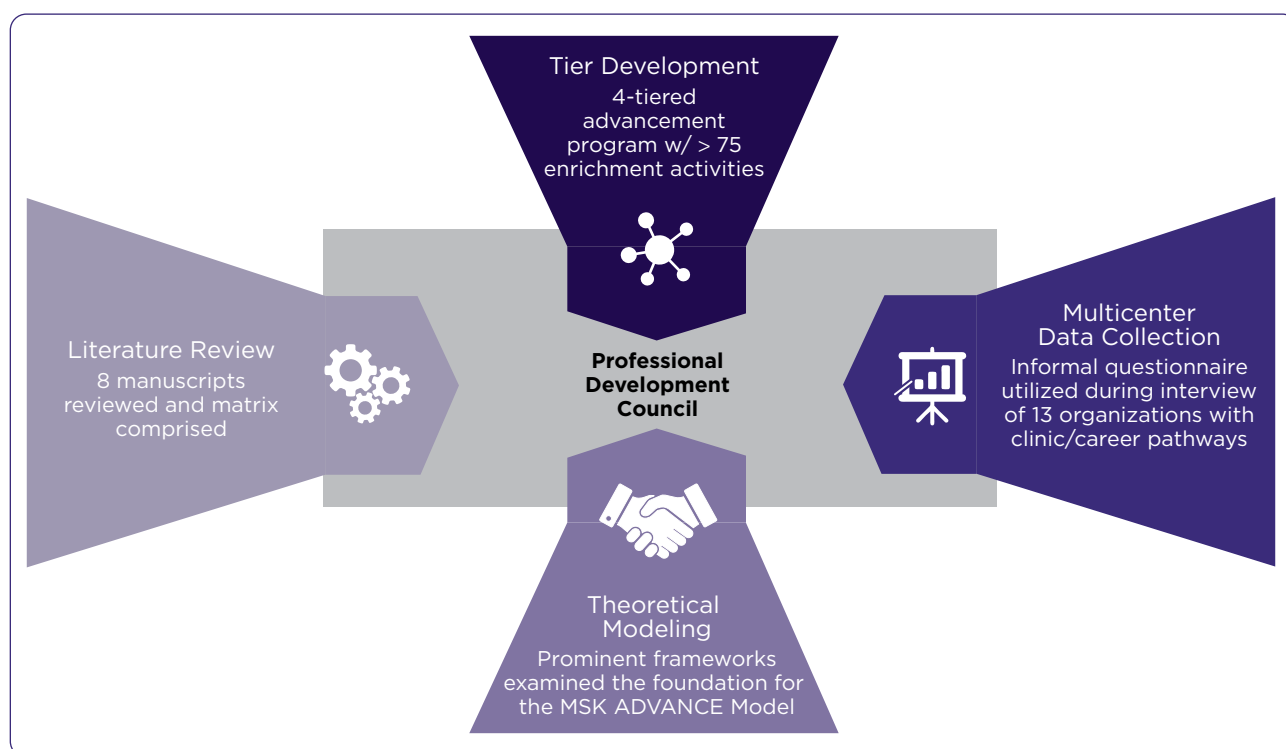


Figure 1. Professional Development Council: Ascend Program committee structure.

Table 1. Literature Review Matrix

Author and year	Theory	Aims	Study design and sample population	Results	Conclusion
Chamblee et al. (2015)	Benner's Novice to Expert Model	Development of a professional portfolio to highlight advanced clinical work and leadership skills at Children's Medical Center in Dallas, Texas.	Descriptive N = 280 APPs inpatient/outpatient	Survey assessed implementation of portfolio: 88% of respondents indicated portfolio better reflected practice.	Professional portfolio: increased APP satisfaction, highlighted professional growth and expertise, validated growth and development.
Warman et al. (2016)	Benner's Novice to Expert Model	Redesign of the Clinical Ladder Program as part of nursing leadership goals at University of Alabama in Birmingham, Alabama.	~3,000 inpatient nurses	Program led to improved employee satisfaction, influenced retention, and helped professional growth.	Continual assessment of effectiveness to align with organizational goals. Provide incentive for experienced nurses to remain at bedside.
Paplanus et al. (2013)	Benner's Novice to Expert Model	Development of a clinical ladder program to support the PD of NPs at NYU Langone Medical Center, New York, NY.	Literature review; 500 APPs in inpatient and outpatient setting	Highlighted need for mentorship, orientation, knowledge translation, and leadership programs to meet professional needs of APPs.	Organizational commitment is critical for PD, job satisfaction, and retention of APPs.
Doerksen (2010)	Strong Model	Evaluation of PD and mentorship needs of advanced practice nurses.	Prospective, mixed-method design; 14 advanced practice nurses (CNS & NP)	Included 5 domains: direct comprehensive care, education, research, support of systems, and publication and professional leadership. Respondent rate ranged from 16% (publication and professional leadership to 100% (research).	APNs identify PD and mentorship needs in all aspects of their roles. Research is regarded as a primary focus for development and required mentorship.
Hespenheide et al. (2011)	Crosswalk convergence of theories (Relationship-Based Care, Magnet Forces, and APRN professional performance standards)	New PD model using portfolios: achievement and competencies at Akron General Hospital in Akron, Ohio.	N/A	Evidence of eligibility demonstrated through a portfolio, based on a checklist of required materials.	APNs' participation in the program enhanced professional growth and development, and APRNs attained personal satisfaction.
McComiskey et al. (2018)	Boyer's	Authors outlined their development of a new PD model.	300	At 1 year post implementation, 80% agreed requirements adequately represented expected professional achievements. 66% agreed the process was rigorous but fair.	An advancement model for APRNs/PAs may be key to a retention and recruitment strategy.
Han et al. (2018)	N/A	Reviewed APRN job satisfaction and intent to leave.	Descriptive systematic review	Extrinsic (admin support and salary) and intrinsic (autonomy and meaningful work) factors affect job satisfaction.	Improving APRN job satisfaction can have positive impacts on retention, practices, and patients.

Note. APP = advanced practice provider; APN = advanced practice nurse; APRN = advanced practice registered nurse; CNS = clinical nurse specialist; NP = nurse practitioner; PA = physician assistant; PD = professional development; N/A = not applicable.

the literature suggested improvements in job satisfaction, increased retention, and ongoing professional development among APPs when a career pathway/bonus program guided by a theoretical framework is implemented (Chamblee et al., 2015; Han et al., 2018).

MULTICENTER STATE OF AFFAIRS

The Multicenter State of Affairs subcommittee identified 13 key institutions that implemented a career and/or clinical advancement program. Subcommittee members engaged with representatives from 12 organizations to discuss tenets of each program, using an informal questionnaire. The review revealed that many programs adopted a tiered approach to advancement, typically consisting of an average of three tiers. Key differences among institutions included whether programs offered specialty tracks for advancement and whether they provided annual rewards or followed a stepwise progression model. Notably, 12 institutions reported a salary increase with each level of advancement. Discussions highlighted potential areas for improvement, such as the complexity of the application process and the challenges of achieving the highest promotional tier.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

During the initial development of the program, several theoretical frameworks were evaluated to serve as its foundation. Theoretical models serve as foundational frameworks or blueprints that guide the delivery of high-quality patient care (Hansen & Dysvik, 2022). A dedicated Theoretical Modeling Committee reviewed existing models and presented their findings for comprehensive evaluation.

The subcommittee examined prominent frameworks, including the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) Synergy Model for Patient Care, Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition, Strong Model of Advanced Practice Nursing, and Benner's Professional Advancement Model (Ackerman et al., 1996; Benner, 1982; Dreyfus, 2004; Kaplow & Reed, 2008). The MSK Advance Model, MSK's APP Career Advancement Pathway of Excellence Theoretical Model, was formed utilizing tenets of The Strong Model of Advanced Practice Nursing and Benner's Novice to Expert model (Ackerman et al., 1996; Ben-

ner, 1982). This framework defines key stages of advancement: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert.

Findings from the literature suggest improvement in job satisfaction, increased retention, and ongoing professional development among APPs when a career development pathway guided by a theoretical framework is implemented (Chamblee et al., 2015; Han et al., 2018). The MSK Advance Model became the foundation for the MSK Ascend Program, which formalizes career development and promotion pathways for APPs. This program emphasizes professional growth, recognizes engagement in professional development, and provides a structure for the ongoing advancement of APP practice.

ASCEND PROGRAM

In May 2018, a seasoned group of APPs formed a committee to develop an APP career pathway at a major metropolitan NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. While the initiatives were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts resumed in January 2022, leading to the creation of the MSK Advance Model. The model comprises seven domains of scholarly engagement, including direct comprehensive care, research, drivers of change, education, publications and professional leadership, technology and innovation, and mentorship. These domains align with APP practice and reflect the breadth of APP practice, highlighting clinical and scholarly contributions to both the institution and profession.

Grounded in the core competencies of NPs and PAs, the model emphasizes clinical expertise, critical thinking, evidence-based practice, and collaboration as its foundation. While core competencies establish the foundational requirements for APP practice, advanced expertise develops over time through experience and proficiency. The MSK Advance Model fosters this growth using a tiered approach that promotes distinction in expertise and provides recognition at each stage of advancement.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To qualify for the MSK Ascend Program, APPs must first meet foundational requirements such as years of experience as an APP, minimum duration

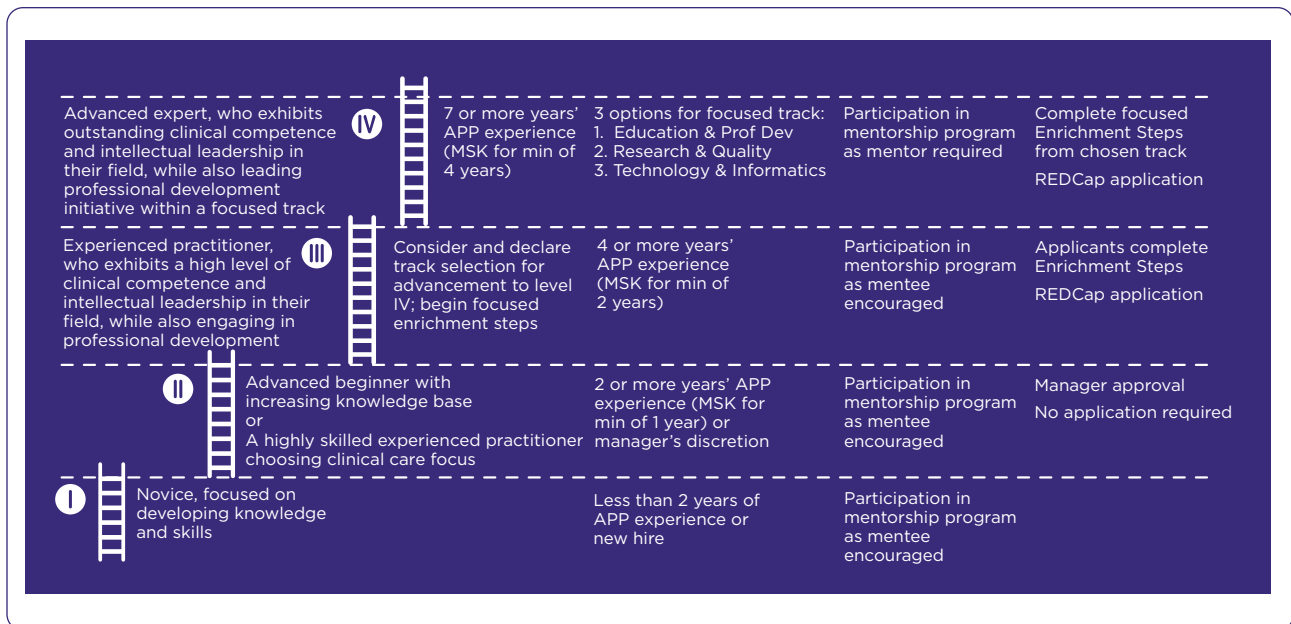


Figure 2. Professional Development Program: Level I to IV.

of employment as an APP at MSK, and employment in either a full-time or part-time status. Advanced practice provider fellows, per diem staff, and managers are not eligible to participate in the program. All APPs joining the institution start at the APP I level. After completing 2 years of employment and achieving a “successful” or higher on their most recent performance appraisal, APPs advance to the APP II level. From there, APPs can apply for promotion to APP III or APP IV. The MSK career pathway includes four defined levels: APP I, APP II, APP III, and APP IV (Figure 2).

MSK ASCEND LEVELS

APP I: Novice Practitioner

An APP I is a novice practitioner focused on developing foundational knowledge and skills. Advanced practice providers without prior experience remain in this position for 2 years. Advanced practice providers with prior experience may advance to APP II after completing 1 year of employment at MSK, provided they receive manager approval. No formal application is required for advancement from APP I to APP II.

APP II: Advanced Beginner

An APP II is an advanced beginner who has acquired additional knowledge and expertise or is

a seasoned provider with a strong focus on clinical care. To qualify, an APP must be employed at MSK for a minimum of 2 years or have received manager approval for advancement if they possess prior APP experience and meet all minimum requirements. Advanced practice providers may remain at this level for the duration of their employment. No monetary compensation is associated with this level.

APP III: Experienced Practitioner

The APP III is an experienced practitioner who demonstrates a high level of clinical competence and intellectual leadership in their field while actively engaging in professional development. This role involves increased complexity and comes with a unique job description that includes specific job responsibilities, competencies, and promotional requirements. To be eligible, an APP must have at least 4 years of APP experience and be employed at MSK for a minimum of 2 years. However, applicants with more than 1 year of employment at MSK who meet all other requirements may waive the 2-year minimum with manager approval. Advancement to the APP III level is accompanied by an annual promotional allowance of \$4,000, disbursed in equal biweekly installments.

APP IV: Advanced Expert

An APP IV is an advanced expert who exhibits outstanding clinical competence and intellectual leadership in their field. These APPs select a specialty track (Education and Professional Development, Research and Quality, or Technology and Informatics) to focus their promotional activities on, leading initiatives that drive advancement in their chosen area.

To qualify for advancement to the APP IV level, applicants must have a minimum of 7 years of APP experience and at least 4 years of employment at MSK. The MSK tenure requirement may be waived with manager approval for applicants who meet all other eligibility criteria. Advancement to APP IV is accompanied by an annual promotional allowance of \$8,000, disbursed in equal biweekly installments, and requires active participation in MSK's Mentorship Program—an evidence-based initiative designed to promote professional growth and development for both mentors and mentees.

APPLICATION AND PROMOTION PROCESS

Both the APP III and IV levels require the submission of a formal application for promotional consideration. Applications are submitted using Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap), a robust and versatile data management and collection tool with widespread applications in clinical research and health care, making it an ideal platform to capture submitted applications with supporting documentation and collect metrics data (Harris et al., 2019).

Applicants must complete a REDCap application, which includes demographic information, enrichment step selection with all supporting documentation, curriculum vitae, and a manager attestation. One letter of recommendation is required for APP III applicants, whereas APP IV applicants must provide two. Importantly, letters of recommendation cannot be written by the applicants' current manager. Applicants must select at least six enrichment activities for promotion to APP III from either category A or category B.

Within the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center Ascend Program, enrichment activities are categorized to reflect progressive levels of professional engagement and leadership. Category

A encompasses foundational and participatory activities that demonstrate meaningful contributions to professional growth and institutional initiatives. Examples include facilitating educational sessions, serving as a preceptor, participating on committees, or contributing to quality improvement or research projects. In contrast, Category B includes advanced, leadership-focused activities that reflect higher levels of responsibility, professional contribution, and organizational or professional impact. These may involve leading or chairing committees and initiatives, presenting at regional or national conferences, developing curricula, serving as primary authors on scholarly work, or spearheading research and quality improvement projects. This tiered structure underscores the importance of recognizing both active participation and leadership contributions, ensuring that advancement through the program reflects a deliberate progression in professional expertise, responsibility, and meaningful impact within the institution and the broader profession.

APP IV applicants must select at least eight enrichment activities, with at least five from category B, aligned with their selected track. Additionally, all enrichment activities must have been completed within the 12 months preceding application submission to be considered eligible.

PROGRAM MAINTENANCE

Ongoing maintenance of the APP career pathway is essential to preserving its integrity, relevance, and continued success. Since its inception, the program has undergone regular evaluation and iterative refinement in response to applicant and stakeholder feedback, application outcomes, and the organization's evolving needs. Members of the Ascend Review Committee, key stakeholders, and program leaders meet regularly to evaluate the application process, the criteria for enrichment activities, and supporting tools like the REDCap platform, to ensure the program remains accessible and rigorous.

A critical component of program maintenance includes review and revision of enrichment activity categories. As clinical roles and professional development opportunities continue to evolve, it is imperative that the program accurately reflects current best practices and recognizes the meaningful

contributions of APPs. Feedback is solicited from applicants, managers, and divisional leaders, and these insights are incorporated into the ongoing development of the program.

Lastly, effective communication and engagement strategies are central to maintaining program quality. Regularly scheduled open office hours, updated guidance documents, and individualized feedback sessions promote transparency, foster a supportive environment, and provide opportunities for program leadership to identify emerging challenges and respond proactively. These initiatives enhance the applicant experience and reinforce the program's commitment to continuous improvement and professional excellence.

PROMOTION MAINTENANCE

Maintaining promotion to APP III and IV levels requires a sustained commitment to clinical excellence, leadership, and professional development. To maintain their levels, APP III and IV practitioners must remain engaged in their clinical responsibilities while contributing to the organization's mission, vision, and values. Advanced practice providers at these levels are expected to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in their respective job descriptions. This includes active participation in professional activities, including quality improvement initiatives, delivering educational presentations, preceptorship, and any other enrichment activities associated with the program.

Evaluation of APP IIIs and IVs occurs annually as part of the performance review process and is conducted by the clinical APP manager, with consideration given to the expectations of their promotional level. In addition, APP IVs are expected to maintain active participation in their designated specialty track and continue participating in the MSK Mentorship Program.

APP IIIs and IVs who are unable to maintain the requirements of their job description as evaluated by their clinical APP manager during their annual performance evaluation are subject to corrective action. This process is intended to uphold the integrity of the program and reinforce professional accountability. Ongoing support is available to help APPs meet expectations. Notably, since the program's implementation, no APP has had their promotional status revoked.

ASCEND PROGRAM WEBSITE

An internal website dedicated to the Ascend Program was created to support information dissemination and streamline the application process. This platform provides comprehensive details about the program, including its theoretical framework, advancement requirements for APP I through APP IV, and descriptions of enrichment steps. It also hosts all submission forms and the updated job description for each advancement level, allowing applicants to access and review them easily.

As the Ascend Program has grown and evolved, the website has become a key and crucial communication tool, enabling real-time updates to be shared with the APP community. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the website thoroughly before submitting their application. The website features on-demand video tutorials on how to apply, information on open office hours, and a frequently asked questions section. The website promotes transparency in the peer review process by providing clear and accessible information to all users.

REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Ascend Review Committee is comprised of 18 clinical APPs, supported by an advisor (the APP Manager of Professional Development) and an executive sponsor (the APP Director of Quality and Professional Development). The committee is co-chaired by two APPs, an NP, and a PA, and includes membership representation from acute care, critical care, ambulatory, pediatrics, perioperative, and regional networks. The committee convenes quarterly to review, discuss, and vote on submitted applications.

The review process begins with the random assignment of applications to pairs of committee members by the co-chairs, ensuring impartiality. Each pair uses a standardized evaluation tool to objectively assess applications, applying consistent criteria to promote fairness and transparency. The evaluation includes a detailed review of eligibility, qualifications, and attainment of minimum enrichment steps for each level. Committee members document their findings in the evaluation tool, highlighting concerns for discussion during the quarterly meetings and attaching all documents submitted by the applicant. After

completing their independent reviews, the two members meet to consolidate their findings into a joint assessment, ensuring that both perspectives are addressed and any discrepancies are addressed, documented, and discussed during the committee review meeting.

During quarterly review meetings, assigned reviewer teams present their evaluations of each applicant. These presentations follow a standardized scoring tool and provide a structured summary of the applicant's qualifications. The full committee then engages in a collaborative discussion to address questions, clarify discrepancies, and ensure that all perspectives are considered. Following deliberation, a majority vote determines whether the application is approved, denied, or held pending additional clarification from the applicant regarding submitted enrichment activities. Applicants who do not meet criteria for advancement to APP III or APP IV are offered individualized feedback and mentorship sessions with two committee members to support future resubmissions.

Applicants dissatisfied with the committee's decision have the option to file a formal appeal, underscoring the program's commitment to fairness and transparency. Appeals must be submitted to the program's executive sponsor within 5 days of receiving the decision and include a detailed rationale. Once the appeal is submitted, it is reviewed and managed by the executive sponsor. The executive sponsor, who is not involved in the initial application review, provides an impartial reassessment of the appeal to ensure a fair outcome.

OUTCOMES

With the initial launch of the Ascend Program (activities reported from 2020–2022), APPs most frequently reported participating in precepting ($n = 254$) in the domain of direct comprehensive care. Under the research domain, APPs most frequently reported participation in institutional review board research studies ($n = 47$) and least often participation in the completion of a grant proposal ($n = 8$). In drivers of change, APPs most frequently participated as members of a committee, subcommittee, or task force ($n = 127$) and least frequently participated in leading or organizing a health-care mission ($n = 3$). For the education do-

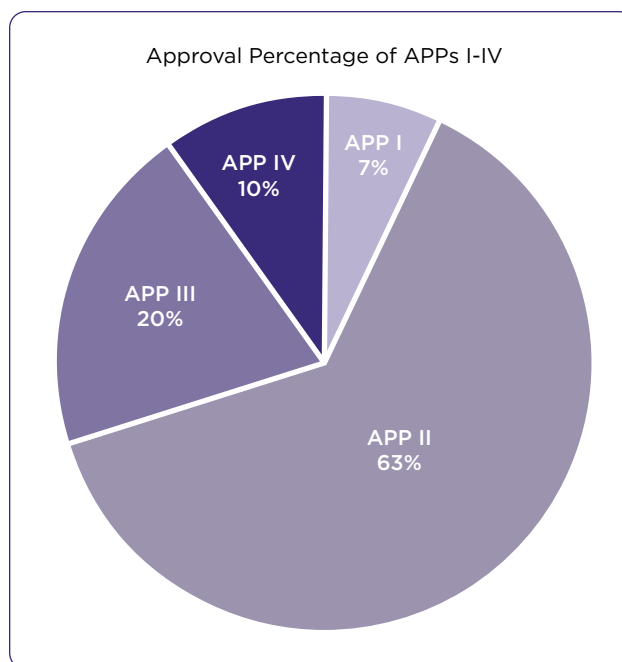


Figure 3. Percentage of APPs currently in levels APP I–IV since inception of Ascend Program.

main, the most frequent activity was for APPs to facilitate or lead a lecture, series, or workshop ($n = 41$), and the least frequent was participation in an evidence-based practice workshop ($n = 2$). Advanced practice providers in the technology and innovation domain were most likely to participate in a service or hospital-wide informatics ($n = 23$) and least likely to participate in helping with website management ($n = 6$). Lastly, for the professional development and leadership domain, most APPs held a specialty certification ($n = 81$), and the least frequent activities were being a journal club moderator ($n = 1$) and being a member of an editorial review board ($n = 2$).

Currently, approximately 1,020 APPs are employed at MSK. Among them, 7% hold the APP I designation, 63% are APP IIs, 20% are APP III, and 10% are APP IV (Figure 3). As noted previously, per diem APPs, managers, and directors are not eligible for the Ascend Program. As of October 2025, 420 APPs (295 [70%] NPs and 125 [30%] PAs) have applied for promotion to APP III or APP IV. Of these, 357 APPs (85%) were successfully promoted (253 [71%] NPs and 104 [29%] PAs). As anticipated, most applications were submitted during the program's first two cycles. The distribution

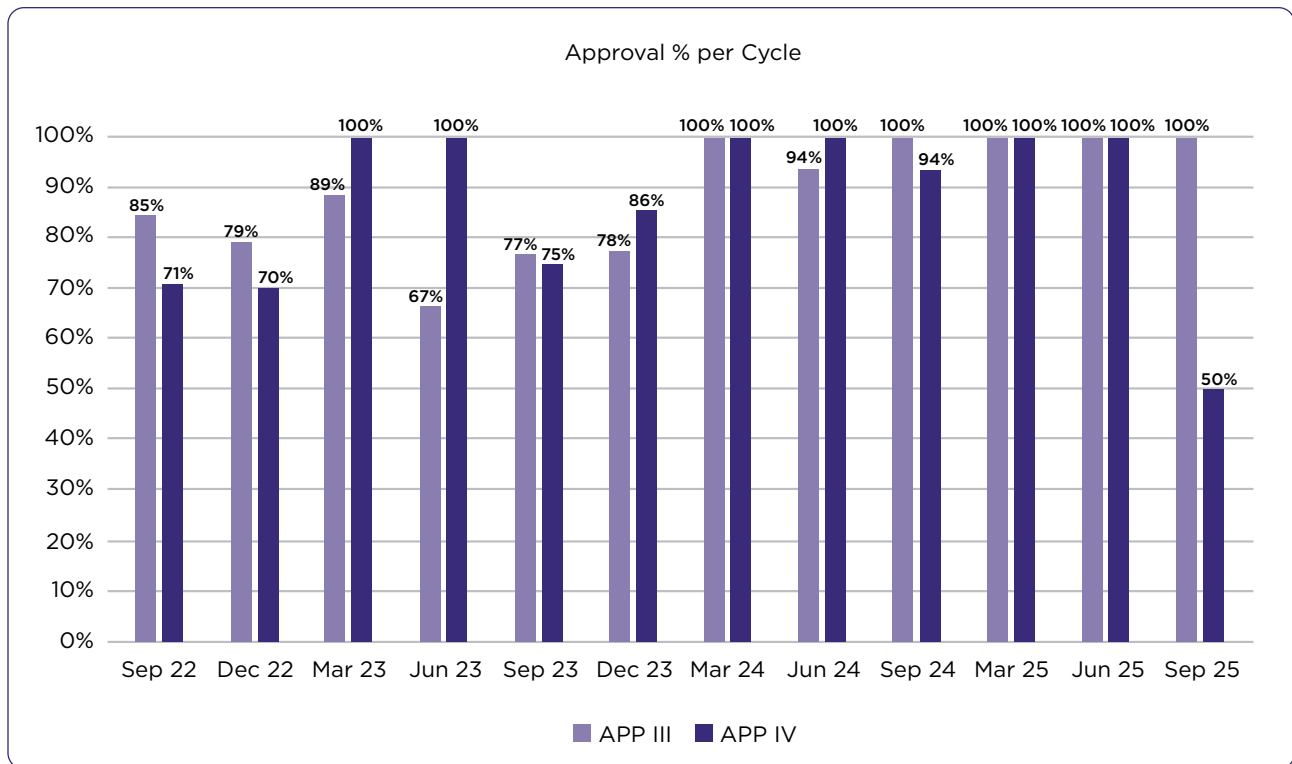


Figure 4. Approval percentage of APP promotions per cycle from September 2022 to September 2025.

of promoted applicants closely reflects the overall NP-to-PA ratio within the institution (Figure 4).

Since the program's inception, 96 poster presentations, 175 podium presentations, and 97 co-authorships have been completed by MSK's APPs. Enrichment activities are evaluated yearly for potential updates and changes.

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Prior to the launch of the Ascend Program, a survey was conducted, the results of which highlighted areas where innovative programs or initiatives need to be developed to increase participation in activities. Since the program's inception, leadership support and buy-in have been invaluable. As with any new initiative, the program faced a learning curve, requiring program modifications.

One of the key lessons learned early was the importance of establishing clear application standards. While this policy was intended to uphold high standards, it soon became evident that this approach was too rigid, excluding potentially strong candidates due to minor omissions. As a re-

sult, the program evolved to adopt a more flexible standard, reviewing all applications unless they were significantly incomplete to the point of hindering a meaningful evaluation. For applications with minor errors, committee members proactively contacted applicants to request corrections. Applicants were given 5 business days to submit requested corrections and documents required to support the submitted application.

Under the revised approach, if an application's incompleteness hinders a meaningful evaluation and is thereby deemed incomplete, the co-chairs notify the applicant that the application will not be moved forward to the review process and offer a personalized one-on-one meeting to discuss components of their application, give detailed feedback, and provide mentorship. These sessions provide applicants with detailed feedback, guidance on application components that did not meet minimum standards, and mentorship to refine future submissions. This revised approach maintains the program's high standards and empowers applicants to improve their materials for future submission cycles. By addressing

gaps in applications while fostering a positive and supportive environment, this shift from a rigid to a more adaptive process significantly enhanced the applicants' experiences and engagement with the program.

Another key lesson gained through the program's development was the importance of offering open office hours to applicants. Starting in June 2023, members of the Ascend Review Committee began hosting these sessions at various times and days in the month leading up to each application cycle. These office hours provided a dedicated space for applicants to ask questions, clarify program requirements, and review their applications and supporting documents for completeness and relevance. This initiative has enhanced the applicant experience by offering real-time support and feedback, boosting applicants' confidence. To date, over 100 applicants have attended these optional sessions. These interactions have improved the quality of submissions and fostered a stronger sense of community and collaboration between the review committee and applicants. Notably, since June 2023, 92% of the applicants who attended at least one session were successfully promoted.

Lastly, despite initial efforts to create a comprehensive list of enrichment steps at the program's inception, it was necessary to make further enhancements. In 2023, two members of the APP community proposed the addition of a new floating enrichment activity to the Ascend Program. Following a formal presentation and thorough discussion by committee members, the enrichment step was approved by a majority vote. The new enrichment step was successfully integrated into the subsequent application cycles.

FUTURE WORK

Opportunities to further strengthen the Ascend Program include leveraging organization-wide engagement and satisfaction surveys. These surveys would evaluate the level of APP engagement and satisfaction with the program, providing valuable insights to guide future program enhancements for continued growth and success. Although preliminary data on burnout rates has been encouraging, analyzing turnover, burnout, and employee satisfaction has been complicated by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, gain-

ing a clearer understanding of these metrics will be crucial for a comprehensive evaluation of the program's impact. Additionally, while a formal mentoring program is already well-established at MSK, there is a growing need to expand mentorship opportunities, particularly for APP IIIs and IVs. Addressing this gap is a priority for future program development and will help foster professional growth and community, networking, and mentoring opportunities, specifically among APP IIIs and IVs.

CONCLUSION

A defining feature of the Ascend Program is its inclusivity, offering all APPs opportunities for professional growth and development, recognition, and advancement to accompany clinical proficiency and excellence. By engaging all APPs in the program, we have established a framework that empowers individuals to choose and pursue their unique career paths, with mentorship and support provided at each step. The MSK Ascend Program fosters excellence and advancement among APPs and reinforces their overall professional growth. The program highlights the value of APP engagement in professional development, creates a formal pathway for promotion and recognition, and serves as a foundation for the continued growth of APP practice at MSK. ●

Disclosure

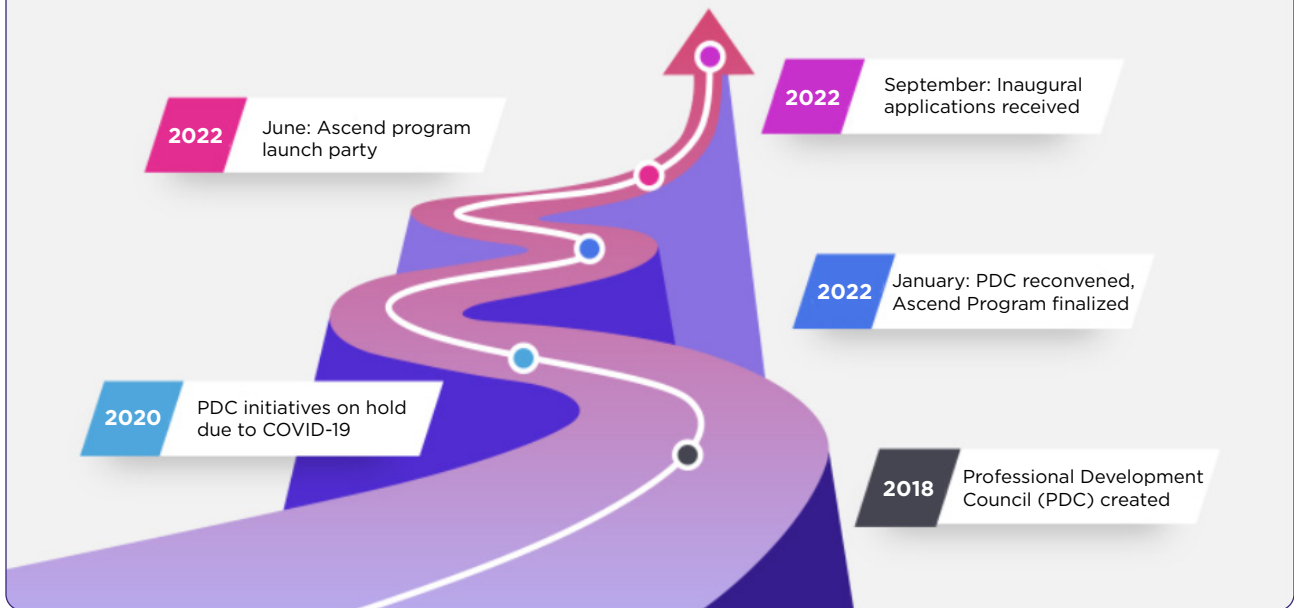
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Ascend Program Timeline



Appendix A. Ascend Program Timeline.