

Celebrating PA Week

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I love PA Week. There is such a sense of excitement and pride as the profession acknowledges the past, celebrates the present, and looks to our future. My first week in physician assistant (PA) education culminated in a Duke University PA Day celebration. I still remember these festivities 13 years later because it was the first time I really thought about the history of the profession and the dedicated people who created the PA concept. I was standing with the fathers of the PA profession, Drs. Eugene Stead and Harvey Estes, that day and talking to the many PAs who had been the groundbreakers and pioneers of the PA profession. The courage of these leaders resounded in that celebration and continues in all that we do today.

As president of the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), I often talk about the strategic initiatives of PA education and the need to attract and train more healthcare providers to meet the growing needs of our nation. One key strategy for achieving this goal focuses on the people of the profession, who are undoubtedly our greatest strength. This group includes the pre-PA applicants, PA students, and educators, as well as practicing PAs and patient advocates. From our own ranks will come our future PA leaders. These people will lead our profession as we tackle the many challenges of tomorrow.

Clearly, we face a time of action and change and have a responsibility to represent our profession with courage and vision. In his book *Leading Change*, John Kotter notes that the traditional model of leadership, which suggests that leadership is “a divine gift of birth, a gift granted to a small number of people,” does not take into account “the power and the potential of lifelong learning.”¹ My students would say they could probably drastically cut the cost of their PA education if they had a dollar for every time they heard that “PAs are lifelong learners.” That mindset, along with our team-based focus, is part of our



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profession’s DNA. Doesn’t that indicate that we are uniquely poised to lead? And that we have the courage to be the leaders who keep the patient-centered focus of our profession, step up to opportunity, and strive to meet the healthcare needs of our nation? Just as our pioneer leaders did, I would say “yes,” we do.

As PA Week celebrations unfold across the nation this month, we focus on leadership and the people of the profession. This year, Duke University PA students will celebrate PA Week with service projects in a variety of volunteer activities throughout the community. We join other students and programs across the country who recognize the week with creative activities. They range from the blood drives and spirited competitions of “PA Olympics” at Butler University in Indianapolis to the distribution of “I Love PAs” buttons by George Washington University PA students throughout their local medical center. These students also help older adults in the DC area stay in their homes longer by providing helpful household support such as mowing lawns or doing light housekeeping. In Colorado, students at the Child Health Associate PA Program pass out fun facts about the profession on Payday candy bars that have the “y” crossed out so that the bars read “pa-day.”

The list of similar contributions by other PA programs around the country goes on and on. As PA students reach out to promote their chosen profession with education and service, they develop leadership skills that they carry to the communities they will serve as healthcare providers.

During PA Week, we draw on the past and look to the future. As a PA educator, I am very optimistic about the future of our profession. Every day, I see the bright faces of students committed to delivering compassionate, competent patient care. Every day, I see dedicated PA faculty and preceptors who recognize the responsibility to educate those bright minds to be the best PAs of the future. We all agree it takes courage to be a PA—but then being courageous is also part of our DNA. The trailblazers of the past knew that as they faced a time of social upheaval and developed new models of medical education. And their courage remains with us today. **JAAPA**

REFERENCE

1. Kotter JP. *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press; 1996.