

2021 President and CEO Annual Membership Report

Submitted by Michel Statler and Mary Jo Bondy

January of 2021 began with hope for a brighter future with the rollout of COVID vaccines to our most vulnerable citizens and communities. Guided by our vision of “Health for All,” our mission, and values, we continued to connect, convene, and support our member community through this unprecedented pandemic. President Michel Statler chose “wellness” as a focus for the year as we saw the impact of a third wave and the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic across the country.

Undaunted, the Board welcomed three new members in January, adding to our new members from 2020. We took this opportunity with a relatively new Board and CEO to examine our governance process and commit to learning and refining knowledge-based decision-making processes. This framework helped immensely throughout the year as we faced critical decisions, such as addressing entry-level doctoral education options, educational programming and the Forum, title change, and strategic planning. We committed early and often to engage our members to guide our decision-making.

Early in 2021, PA programs remained primarily virtual. We invited our programs to participate in wellness practices through a sponsored program with Kim Bercovitz, PhD, aka “Dr. Kim”, and intentionally encouraged our PA community to understand their collective and individual needs. We heard the safety concerns and ramped up advocacy for the inclusion of faculty and students as priority recipients of the COVID vaccine. As progress was made, we saw PAs playing a critical role in mass vaccinations. Eventually, this led to an executive order and calls for legislative action to include students as protected responders providing vaccination administration for this and future pandemics. We also continue our advocacy today to promote the SAVE Act.

In early spring, we welcomed Monica Miles, PhD, as our new Chief of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and promoted Sara Fletcher, PhD, to be our Chief Operations Officer. Though vaccination rates of faculty and students were increasing, we still felt uncomfortable gathering in person. The Board has remained virtually engaged throughout 2021. We conducted our first virtual gathering of new PAEA volunteer leaders, part of a strategy to be intentional about transparency and community-building. We also charged our mission advancement commissions to focus their efforts on diversity, equity, and inclusion in response to the request of our members to attend to this priority. We subsequently held our Leadership Summit virtually to gather insights and perspectives across our Association to develop an envisioned future that would guide our strategic planning process.

Although this year has been dominated by COVID-19, we have been intentional in our efforts to move the Association forward — to create a professional home for PA educators that is member-centric, user-friendly, and responsive to your needs. Below are highlights from our year.

Admissions

Diversity of our profession was the number one concern voiced by our members during last year's Forum. We have used this year to examine potential barriers to diversity, starting with our admission process. Dr. Miles and her team developed a methodology to examine our CASPA data, providing us with insights into roadblocks and barriers to diversity in our profession and asked us to critically examine some long-held assumptions. The Presidents Commission, led by Past President Stephane VanderMeulen, MPAS, PA-C, took up the charge to examine admissions diversity, building on their work that started last year. Their subsequent paper and Forum panel provides us all with a road map and a call to action for doing our part to diversify the PA profession.

Advocacy and Clinical Sites

Through our Rapid Response Surveys, we have learned how much COVID-19 has impacted clinical training. In addition to our efforts to prepare faculty and students for telemedicine and our advocacy efforts around vaccination, significant efforts were made to advance clinical site availability for PA programs and students.

The Opioid Response Network funding secured in September of 2021 (ORN-2) allowed us to hire Donna Murray, DMSc, PA-C, to join our team to facilitate clinical training experiences for PA students, including exposure to patients with mental health diagnoses and substance use disorders in clinical settings. She also helped address a lack of familiarity with PAs among mental and behavioral health providers and educate them about the workforce pipeline benefits systems accrue through training PA students.

Recognizing the significant disparities in healthcare outcomes during COVID-19 and the ongoing disparities of maternal and fetal health, PAEA continued to partner with the Black Maternal Health Caucus to advocate for legislation designed to improve the diversity of the national maternal health workforce.

Building on our medication-assisted treatment (MAT) efforts and substance use disorder outreach work, PAEA received funding for expansion of the SUD Curriculum which allows students to become eligible for MAT-waiver training and prepares them to address addiction in their future practice. To date, more than 1,200 students have participated in the 8-hour curriculum. We are happy to announce that the SUD Curriculum is being made available to all member programs. Information including how to sign-up to participate will soon be available on the PAEA website

Assessment

This year, the Assessment Team, led by Oliva Zeigler, modeled what the future of informed decision-making will look like at PAEA. Starting with member outreach to better understand the future needs around testing, the Assessment team sent "request for proposals" to several

leaders in the assessment industry to help us modernize the exam delivery experience — all while working to develop assessment literacy among faculty and staff, developing new test items across multiple exams and executing a virtual standard-setting process for the End of Curriculum exam. To date, the team has administered 66,956 across all exam types, including 16,334 PACKRAT administrations at 219 programs; 4,560 End of Rotation administrations at 210 programs, and 4,062 End of Curriculum administrations at 105 programs. This is impressive work considering the End of Curriculum launched in January 2020 and to date it has been administered 6,444 at 130 programs. PAEA Assessment continues to grow under the leadership of Kim Cavanagh, our Editor in Chief, and Olivia Ziegler, our Chief of Assessment. To advance our efforts to better meet our members' needs, PAEA has hired a Senior Director for Assessment. Robert Furter, PhD, MS, joined the Association on September 7. A psychometrician by training, he will help to advance our work in assessment literacy.

Faculty Development

In March of this year, after examining the data in the Rapid Response Reports and the clinical science data related to vaccination rates, the Board made the difficult decision to hold the 2021 PAEA Education Forum virtually. As we experience this fourth wave of COVID-19, we are grateful that the Board prioritized the safety of our members and staff and have continued to support the efforts of PAEA to expand our virtual engagement. To date, we have virtually produced 7 webinar showcases highlighting the innovation of our programs and executed 4 New Faculty Jumpstarts, 2 New Clinical Coordinator Jumpstarts, and 2 New Program Directors Jumpstarts. We are piloting our first longitudinal Program Director's Accelerator this fall, with more to come in the year ahead. We also look forward to restarting our in-person workshops, beginning in the spring of 2021 in Austin, Texas. A regional expansion of faculty development has been a long-term goal of the Board, and we are expanding the team to make this successful. Under the leadership of Karen Hills, Chief of Educational Development, PAEA has doubled our educational programming opportunities. And we are not stopping there. We are also in the process of reimagining the Preceptor Handbook, one of the most used resources in our Digital Learning Hub. This resource will be available later this year with a refreshed and rebranded look and current pearls of wisdom for preceptors.

Research Reimagined

As clinicians and educators, we recognize the value of research to inform decision-making. We also know how time-consuming it can be to complete surveys. With Dr. Miles at the helm of our Research team and the Research Mission Advancement Commission, PAEA has looked comprehensively at how we survey members to inform our processes. We know from experiences how busy your lives are. Through our new and improved member community, you can now update your profile, and information related to your program will pre-populate our surveys. We ask only that you verify your information. You will notice this new and improved method in the fall as we return to conducting program surveys annually. We have integrated the CASPA directory survey and onboarding survey process into our annual program survey. We are streamlining and reducing your work as we continue to report on PA education.

Research has expanded opportunities for faculty engagement. In addition to our PAEA-AAPA fellowship, the Don Pedersen and the faculty generated research grants, research is also offering writing retreats and office hours to encourage research and scholarship engagement.

Through generous Board support, we have entered a partnership with the International Association of Medical Science Educators (IAMSE) to support our historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This first of its kind agreement will provide comprehensive support to PA programs housed at HBCUs to develop PA program leadership and faculty scholarship to advance diversity in our profession. Development of faculty as scholars continues with our new writing sessions and support and our “Ask a Researcher” event sponsored in tandem with our Research Mission Advancement Commission.

Looking Ahead

2021 has been a year of responsiveness. We moved beyond reaction and have intentionally engaged members to inform our decisions. With a new strategic plan in the works, PAEA looks forward to a year of renewal in 2022. We also look forward to celebrating the Association’s 50th anniversary, welcoming you back to in-person events while remaining engaged online. We anticipate continued growth and expansion as we receive and engage the next generation of PA educators. We will continue to lead, innovate, and advance excellence in education for many years to come.