

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR

Happy Spring!! It is so wonderful to experience the change of season from winter dormancy to the growth of spring! There is excitement in the air as we prepare the Class of 2018 for graduation and the Class of 2020 for orientation. Meanwhile, the Class of 2019 has been working diligently to study aspects of the primary care curriculum through classroom experiences, simulations, case studies, and clinical rotations in preparation for their own medical practice as a rural primary care physician assistants for North Dakota and the surrounding region. The spring semester is certainly one of our busiest times and I thank the clinical and community faculty, standardized patients, volunteers, clinical coordination team, students, and staff for your teamwork and dedication to PA education.

Along with the theme of seasonal change to spring, the transformative change of a PA student from orientation on through clinical preparation and graduation is remarkable. Students enter the program with high energy and enthusiasm, but also with some hesitancy regarding the uncertainty of the next two years in a professional graduate program. As they progress, they deeply explore and learn medical content and “grind through” an enormous amount of complex material which is soon thereafter applied in the clinical setting to solidify retention of concepts and skills. As students prepare for graduation, there is a sense of confidence in their knowledge and clinical skills in preparation for the national board exam; however, hesitancy and uncertainty at times appear in relation to board results and beginning a new medical practice. Amazingly, students’ transformation comes full-circle as new clinicians enter practice and may even begin the process of precepting future students, and the process begins again.

The continuous challenge in PA education is the recruitment and

retention of primary care and specialty clinical sites. As mentioned in the earlier newsletter, if you are serving as a clinical preceptor, my sincere gratitude for your dedication. It is an honor to work with such amazing people who are committed to educating students. If you are not yet serving as a clinical preceptor, please consider giving back to the profession by educating the next generation of PAs. It is truly a rewarding experience to serve as a clinical educator and to benefit from the connectedness with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences.



Best wishes for a happy summer!

Jeanie McHugo, PhD, PA-C
Chair, Dept of PA Studies
UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences

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CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2018



Congratulations to the Class of 2018! We are so proud of our graduates and their families for this amazing accomplishment. A big thank you to all of our faculty, staff, and all of the incredible preceptors for preparing these outstanding students for their future as health care providers.

NDAPA UPDATE

Greetings from the North Dakota Academy of PAs!

The NDAPA is working hard for the PAs in North Dakota. We just wrapped up our 40th Annual Spring Primary Care Seminar in Fargo and are also considering a fall conference in Bismarck. Stay tuned!

The NDAPA and other state chapters are your voice in the profession. The mission of NDAPA is to promote quality, cost-effective, accessible health care while also promoting the professional and personal development of Physician Assistants. The NDAPA and other state chapters do this by providing education to PAs, actively participating in legislative matters related to our practices, and attending all Board of Medicine meetings.

Students of the UND PA Program are welcomed into the NDAPA with free membership during their matriculation. Students are represented on the NDAPA Board by electing one student member to the Board, giving them a voice in the Academy. Each year, students from the UND PA Program also present their scholarly research projects at our spring conference.

If you are not a member of the NDAPA or the state in which you practice, please consider it!

Jay Metzger, MPAS, PA-C
President, NDAPA

ALUMNI FEATURE

Annette Larson, MSPAP, PA-C

Tell me briefly about your professional path as a PA.

It's difficult to be brief when my career expanded over 40 years. I began my new role as a provider in January 1979 in Harvey, N.D., after graduating from what was then the FNP/PA program at the UND School of Medicine. I passed both certifying exams and practiced in Harvey for two years. It was there that I developed a strong foundation in family practice. My role involved seeing patients of all ages in the clinic and emergency room. I did prenatal care and assisted on all OB deliveries with my supervising physician and first assisted on some cases in the OR. I also made rounds at the assisted living/nursing home facilities attached to the hospital. On occasions I accompanied the ambulance crew transferring a high-risk patient to either Minot or Bismarck. I have always been grateful for the depth and breadth of experience and knowledge I gained and the many good people working there who accepted me in the role of NP/PA. My family practice experience continued when my supervising physician, Dr. Boyd Addy, and I decided to start a practice in Mandan, N.D. We soon developed a thriving clinic – he taking care of emergency visits and chronic disease and I taking care of women and children. I learned so much about running a clinic and my only regret was that I did not buy into the business. At that time in my life I had no skill in the business arena. In 1988 I decided to step out of my comfort zone and work with a plastic surgeon in Bismarck – Dr. Curtis Juhala. He was the country doctor in plastic and hand surgery for western North Dakota working at both hospitals. I saw patients in the clinic, assisted in surgery, and rounded on patients in the hospital. In 1991, Dr. Juhala was called to Desert Storm and during his absence I was recruited to and accepted a faculty position to teach at the program I attended in 1978. From the moment I stepped into the classroom in July 1991 to my departure in December 2011 I knew my prior clinical experience had prepared me to be a teacher in the program. I had practiced in rural and urban settings, and in primary and specialty care. I had been employed in both private and corporate settings. I loved teaching in the classroom, I loved working with students in groups or one on one, and I loved traveling throughout the country to meet preceptors and see clinical sites. I also had the good fortune to keep up my clinical skills working at Altru Urgent Care every Monday night during those years. In 2012, I stepped down from teaching knowing I was getting worn out adjusting to all the changes in technology and the work involved in transitioning the PA program from a certificate to a master's degree. I was very fortunate to walk across campus to the university's student health center where I practiced clinically until my retirement in January 2018. There I was able to teach students about their health, patient by patient.

What do you miss the most about your involvement with the UND PA Program?

That is an easy answer – the students. They were all risk takers giving up their prior careers and moving into a new field often in uncharted waters in their communities. They loved learning and showed such excitement when they mastered a certain skill and/or made the correct diagnosis. They could not see how they were growing as a professional, but I could. They later realized that overcoming their fears gave them confidence. It was so fun to watch and very rewarding.

What advice might you give to a student entering clinicals for the first time?

Show up every day with a desire to learn. Stay focused on your clinical objectives. Don't be too hard on yourself, we have all been there and it takes time to grow into being a clinician. Learn to communicate clearly and effectively with your preceptor. Let him/her know on a regular basis what your needs are. You must steer the ship in regard to your learning and getting your objectives met. Do what you fear and watch it disappear!

What observations do you have about the changing PA profession, its place in health care, and its future?

It excites me every time I see a billboard with a picture of a PA on it or read a newspaper reporting the hiring of a PA at an institution or see a PA on television reporting on a certain medical condition. That was unheard of in my beginning years. The future for PAs has never been brighter. The AAPA's position on reducing barriers to practice and promoting guidance and leadership to its members will only strengthen the profession. It's important that each of us be an advocate and get involved on a local, state, and/or national level. I believe the biggest barrier in PA education currently is obtaining and maintaining strong clinical sites with preceptors who are excited about teaching. To produce talented and bright PAs in the future, programs must have access to clinical sites/preceptors that help students learn and grow in the art and science of practicing medicine.

What's next for you in retirement?

That's a good question. I have only been retired four months and in that time I have traveled to South Africa, Colorado, and Norway. Travel has always been and continues to be a great adventure for me. Currently my new job is getting back to healthy living – cooking, exercising, reading, and sleeping! The rest is unknown. For now I am just going to wait and see what opportunities come my way!





Our faculty had the opportunity to present at the PAEA Conference last fall and discussed Engaging Students in Online Learning. This session was designed to provide an overview of issues shaping online learning and student engagement as well as share ideas currently being implemented in online coursework. Left-to-right are: Daryl Sieg, Program Faculty; Julie Solberg, Program Faculty; Dr. Jeanie McHugo, Department Chair



Students donated some of their time in several community service projects this year. They spent time giving back to the community at the Northlands Rescue Mission in Grand Forks and helped out at the Mission's thrift store. The UND PA Program wants the community to know they are not only teaching outstanding PAs but also providing them with people who genuinely care about their communities!

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Kaitlyn Wirtz, UND PA Program Student

What is your favorite part about PA School? What is the most meaningful part of PA School?

The most meaningful aspect of PA School has been practicing in the clinic, establishing relationships with the people of the community, and growing in knowledge and reason. Learning about each patient, hearing his or her story, and coming alongside to help them heal has been by far the greatest blessing. A close second is watching classmates grow into future providers of the nation!

When you walk through the doors of the clinic for your clinical placement what is going through your mind?

Each day is an opportunity to grow and learn from the patients, my preceptor, and other staff in the clinic. My goal is to always remain curious, so I never stagnate in my growth as a student and as a lifelong learner. Lastly, I always look forward to the ways God is going to delight and surprise me – from praying with a patient who needs spiritual healing to letting a patient listen to her heart beat through a stethoscope for the first time. Each day is a new day, and I am always eager for the road ahead of me.

What has surprised you about PA School?

I have been surprised by how quickly our minds are able to soak in new information, integrate this into our previous experiences, and develop a robust knowledge and understanding of the art of medicine. The pace of the program is full and fast, but I have been truly amazed at how quickly our team has grown and developed with each passing didactic and clinical experience.

Do you feel that having a preceptor who is a graduate of UND's PA Program gives you either an advantage or disadvantage over your classmates?

The gift of having my preceptor (Carrie Affield, PA-C at Barnesville Area Clinic) from the UND PA Program has been such a blessing. From the day I walked into the clinic, she understood how our program functions, what knowledge I should be expected to know, and how to challenge me in taking the next steps. She reminds me to take everything day by day and is always a source of encouragement. I hope all alumni consider becoming a preceptor for future students.

What is the most challenging thing about PA School?

The biggest challenge PA School has brought has been balancing clinical hours and studying while protecting family time. My faith and family have always been and will always be my top priorities and learning to juggle this with the demands of school has been challenging. But the support I have from family keeps me pushing forward and I am so blessed to have them as my team.

Briefly describe your passion for serving rural and underserved communities?

My passion for serving rural and underserved communities began long ago when I participated in mission trips, specifically to Honduras. My heart has always had its greatest joy by serving those with the greatest need. Which leads me to desiring a job in a rural ND community in great need of a primary care provider. My passion is summated perfectly in quote from a man by the name of Frederick Buechner who said, "Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

What will you remember most about your time as a student in the UND PA Program?

I will remember the classmates, preceptors, and UND staff who truly made completing the program possible. I will remember the commitment my family made towards my journey into becoming a PA. And I will remember two quotes for the rest of my life: "Yard by yard is hard, but inch by inch is a cinch" and "trust the process."

Where do you see the future of the PA profession in ND?

I really do believe the future of the PA profession in North Dakota will continue to explode. The state desperately needs primary providers care to step in to rural and underserved areas, and the UND PA Program focuses heavily on preparing students to serve these areas. As a whole, the PA profession is opening doors by providing greater access to care and improving the efficiency of the healthcare system.

SPECIAL NOTE TO PRECEPTORS

Interested in helping educate future providers in your area? Call us and ask us about becoming a Preceptor!



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COMMUNITY SERVICE



The UND PA Program offered specialized training to the National Guard at no charge as part of its service mission. The Simulation Center at the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences gave the medics the opportunity to train in a more realistic setting and increased their confidence in their abilities to treat future patients.



PA Students were given the opportunity to perfect their pediatric skills by interacting with children for direct hands-on patient care in a realistic setting. The UND PA Program trains its students in the most realistic way possible to ensure quality care for future patients.