

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020
Vol. 2, No. 2



NEW DIRECTIONS

Hello and greetings from the UND Physician Assistant Program!

After an unprecedented spring, it is finally summer here in North Dakota! It is truly amazing how the past several months have evolved. What is even more amazing is how well the PA team of students, preceptors, faculty, staff, and administration have all worked together to ensure continued learning for our students given the pandemic circumstances. As a team, we became proficient in online meetings, more patient in problem solving, increasingly flexible in scheduling, and adaptable to our new environment.

First, the students: On the afternoon of March 17, students, preceptors, and clinical sites received an e-mail from the Program communicating the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences (SMHS) mandate to suspend clinical placements immediately and until further notice. Students both enrolled in classes on campus and away in clinical placements were asked to remain safe by staying home, practicing social distancing when needing to go out, and being patient while we aspired to determine next steps in their education. Trusting in the program, students truly learned the value of flexibility, adaptability, and resilience in a time of great uncertainty.

Next, the faculty and staff: With only a few hours notice, faculty and staff were required to relocate our work to our homes and adjust schedules accordingly. Adjusting to new environments, many faculty/staff needed to quickly construct an office space at home, allow for changes of other household members, homeschool or provide care for their children, and adjust to spouses with reduced hours.

Administration of both the SMHS and UND worked diligently to respond to the novel coronavirus pandemic, provided a safe working and learning environment for the university community, and strived to develop guidelines during an ever-changing and evolving national crisis. Implementing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, communication from university leaders was frequent and as clear as possible given the known information at the time. Institutional officials ensured availability for questions and responded as best they could given the developing scenario nationwide.

Finally, our many preceptors and clinical sites: Without your willingness to work with our PA students each and every day, we truly could not

meet our goal of preparing quality PAs for rural primary care. Your understanding and flexibility during this time has been greatly appreciated. Thank you for all of your time and energy in sharing your expertise with the next generation of PA providers. We are sincerely grateful for your dedication and commitment to PA education.



Further, a special note to all the UND PA alums who are actively practicing medicine during this time of public health crisis. You have been in my thoughts daily as you are challenged by working in a totally new context, one for which perhaps we did not adequately prepare you, but one for which maybe nothing could have prepared you. You may be exhausted due to heavy workloads and heavier personal protective equipment. You may be fearful of becoming infected and/or infecting others. You may feel powerless to handle patients and their families in their time of need. But know that you have no doubt done well. You have relied on your families, friends, and coworkers—and your training—for support to cope with the situation. Think of all you have learned from this unique experience. Think of all that you will take into your future practice, your patient care, your relationships and your personhood. You have certainly done your best and we are so proud of you!

Throughout the past several months we have all learned many things. We have learned that through these experiences comes growth—growth in knowledge, growth in empathy, and growth in unity. As a result, we learn that we cannot do this alone. We learn by navigating these unprecedented waters together that our health care team is much more than the sum of its parts. Only when we work together and respect the value of our differences can we grow beyond ourselves. We may not be finished with this national pandemic, but reflecting on all we have experienced and learned through the past several months provides a better understanding and confident preparedness for the future.

Jeanie McHugo, Ph.D., PA-C
Chair, Department of Physician Assistant Studies
UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences

STUDENT REFLECTIONS DURING COVID-19

Brenton Green, Class of 2020

How did the coronavirus pandemic affect you professionally?

The Coronavirus pandemic affected me professionally by delaying my program completion by three weeks. And the job I applied for in family medicine was put on hold. Other job listings that were posted were also withdrawn, but I am hopeful the market will open back up soon. On a positive note, I have been able to spend more time with my family during isolation.



What has been the biggest challenge during this time period and how did you strive to adapt?

The biggest challenge for me was the unknown and having to be patient—we could only move forward one day at a time. This applied to both our school and worldwide. To adapt I would focus on what I could control. I spent my time preparing for my final rotation and graduation, because eventually I would be allowed back into the clinic. I am also preparing for the national certification exam. I would remind myself that the pandemic is affecting everyone and we just need to make the best of it.

What lessons have you learned from this experience?

Our first day of orientation we discussed being adaptable, resilient, and prepared as PA students. This provided me some guidance during the pandemic. It allowed for patience and growth in a new environment. Physician Assistants prepare to treat any patient condition that may present at the clinic or hospital; however, this pandemic was a reminder that no matter how prepared we are, life will demand that we must adapt to overcome tough times.

Describe how you might incorporate this experience into your care for patients.

Some experts think this coronavirus could be with us for a long time, which indicates that we will need to research new ways to combat the virus. Researchers are currently working on vaccinations and are learning about potential interactions with current medications, chronic diseases, and potential treatments. Moving forward, we'll need to adapt to the latest guidelines to ensure the greatest outcome for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of our patients.

How might this positively impact your future clinical practice.

The advent of stay-at-home orders across the country has increased the amount of telemedicine hospitals are providing. I could see the practice continuing this method of care for those patients with travel limitations, at high-risk, or during a future outbreak. Telemedicine has its limitations, but it has provided a great service during the pandemic.

I am extremely grateful for being given the opportunity to attend UND and the PA program. It was so wonderful getting to know all the staff in the department, and I hope to be able to give back in the future. I can't express how much I have appreciated my time in the program over the past two years, along with all the individual help in advising, teaching class, e-mail, hosting labs, exam preparation, and more.

Julie Harmon, Class of 2021

I was removed from my clinical site two days early. My hometown and clinic affiliation are in the state of Georgia. We were hit rather hard with the virus in our county. One of the doctors I work with also contracted the virus.



On a personal note, I had to navigate doing my schoolwork online while also helping my 9 year-old daughter and my 17 year-old son finish their fourth grade and junior years at home. This was challenging and often comical at times. My son would be doing virtual football workouts while I was doing standardized patient labs for school. A good measure of grace was needed!

Definitely, the biggest challenge I faced was balancing my time as a student with the demands of being a mother to children who were home all day long. I was accustomed to them being at school while I completed the majority of my work. One of the things that has helped me was taking a walk for one hour outside every morning (weather permitting) to allow some time to myself to think before the hustle and bustle of the day begins. This is after coffee, of course!

I have learned that I need to ask for and accept help from others. I have the tendency to think I am capable of handling more than I am. It has been a good experience both training and allowing my children to participate daily in the household duties. I learned that my daughter CAN wash dishes and EVERYONE can do laundry! It also highlighted what things are most important in life. We spent so much more time together with family meals, online church, and game nights. Human connection is very important to me, and I very much appreciated being able to consult with my study group virtually and see us lift each other up when one of us was down.

One of the things we emphasize to patients is that self-care is important, as is reaching out to others if you need help, whether your challenges are due to physical illness or emotional distress. Human connection is a very important part of life that can be achieved in more than one way. We can connect in person, via telephone, or online.

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STUDENT REFLECTIONS DURING COVID-19

Continued

In my practice, I hope to develop my listening skills even further so that I pick up on the needs of the patient, whether verbalized or nonverbalized. My ultimate desire is to make a connection with patients with the goal of making shared decisions that will benefit their health.

Breanna Krueger, Class of 2021

We were notified on March 17 that UND leadership recommended all students cease their clinical rotations because of the pandemic. At that time, I was in Beulah, N.D., finishing up the last week of my first primary care rotation. The UND PA program handled the situation with grace and we transitioned into online learning quite seamlessly. We did miss out on about four weeks of primary care clinical time because of the pandemic, but were able to complete educational content online, so I don't feel like my education was set back at all.



I am feeling a fair amount of pressure to be a source of pandemic related information for my friends and family members because of my medical education. It has been challenging to remain up to date on current recommendations and findings about the virus and the disease it causes because they seem to change every day. I am doing my best to frequently check into the CDC's current guidelines as well as other

trusted health care networks such as Johns Hopkins. Aside from that, I'm also reminding myself that it's okay to be a student right now, and it's okay to not have all the answers.

One lesson I learned from this experience is the importance of being flexible. When it was first announced that we were asked to leave our clinical rotations, I was very nervous about missing that valuable experience and time spent in the clinic. I've come to learn that it will in fact all turn out okay. No matter the route, or how long it takes, I will be a PA-C one day--hopefully in the Summer of 2021 as planned.

The most important thing I can take from my personal experience with the pandemic is to recommend that patients are seeking out good, reliable, evidence-based information when it comes to the coronavirus--or any infectious disease for that matter.

The pandemic has taught me and the entire country a lot in terms of managing infectious diseases. For example, Coal Country Community Health Center in Beulah where I am completing my primary care rotations exemplified an appropriate response to the pandemic. They were prompt in recognizing the public health threat and instituted a "sick" clinic and a "well" clinic to minimize spread. In my future clinical practice, I hope to be a clinician who is proactive rather than reactive in the face of potential epidemics, pandemics, and individual conditions. After all, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of a cure."

PI ALPHA HONOR SOCIETY

Pi Alpha is the national physician assistant honor society organized for the promotion and recognition of both PA students and graduates. Membership signifies the inductees' significant academic achievement and honors them for their leadership, research, community/professional service, and other related activities. The society also encourages a high standard of character and conduct among students and graduates. With this in mind, we are pleased to announce that the following SMHS Physician Assistant Studies students – all of whom maintained a 4.0 GPA – were inducted into the Pi Alpha Honor Society this year. Congratulations!

- Emi Binstock – Dickinson, N.D.
- Steffani Johnston Mack – Fargo, N.D.
- Matthew Knealing – Golden Valley, Minn.
- Hannah Tkach – West St. Paul, Minn.

\$50 FOR 50

To help celebrate our 50-year milestone, the PA Department would like to ask its alumni and colleagues to bolster its student scholarship funds with a gift of \$50. Donors can select whether the gift goes into our Katherine Maryann Rasmussen or Mickey Knutson scholarships funds. These funds provide critical financial need to our students each year. Please help us lessen our students' financial burden!

You can make a gift today by returning the enclosed card or by going online at UNDalumni.org/PA50for50. If you have any questions, please contact the School's Alumni & Community Relations Director Jessica Sobolik at 701.777.6048 or jessica.sobolik@UND.edu.

CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2020!



PERSEVERANCE

Persevere (verb): to persist in anything undertaken; maintain a purpose in spite of difficulty, obstacles, or discouragement; continue steadfastly.

The faculty of the University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences Department of Physician Assistant Studies hosted a virtual PA Graduation Ceremony on Friday, May 15, 2020, at 10 a.m. Jeanie McHugo, Ph.D., PA-C, department chair, presided over the ceremony for the 45th graduating class. Dr. McHugo reflected with the class on their journey to graduation. Students and faculty recalled their emotions—*anxious, nervous, excited, eager and uncertain of the future*—which seemed to be the same from the first week of orientation to putting on a white coat and seeing patients for the first time to this spring’s events when the coronavirus pandemic hit. She encouraged these now former students to celebrate their

accomplishments and that everything is going to be okay. The welcome was given by Eric Johnson, M.D., the program’s medical director and associate professor. Dr. Johnson shared that this is a time of great change in health care and that these graduates will go on to do great things they may not have anticipated. They will be writing the script for what is yet to come. He ended with the advice to “trust in your education, build your work on relationships with those that can help you, challenge yourselves as life-long learners, and be a teacher where you can.”

All the best to our graduates!

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Julie Skiba

Julie Skiba joined the Department of Physician Assistant Studies at the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences in February of 2020. Julie was born and raised in rural central Minnesota. She first learned of the PA profession after being cared for by a PA at the local clinic and knew at that time that she wanted to become a PA. After graduating from high school, Julie attended The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minn. During her time there, she also worked part time as a certified nursing assistant to gain invaluable health care experience. She graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology. She then went on to obtain a Master of Science degree in Physician Assistant Studies from the New York Institute of Technology in 2012. Julie has practiced in



emergency medicine and general and trauma surgery in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area for the past eight years prior to joining the Department of Physician Assistant Studies at UND. She continues to practice emergency medicine part time.

Julie has always had a passion for learning, but it was during her own PA education that she developed an interest in teaching as well. While she has spent time as a preceptor for PA students over the past several years, she is excited to be more involved in the formal education of future PAs.

Julie lives in Grand Forks, N.D., with her husband, Josh, and their two children, Caleb and Amelia. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her family.

RESEARCH AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences Department of Physician Assistant Studies has recognized the research of members of the Class of 2020 and awarded scholarships to students from the Class of 2021.

Research Awards were presented to the following graduates of the Class of 2020 on May 15 during a Virtual Graduation Ceremony:

- Outstanding Scholarly Project, Faculty Choice: Brenton Green of Bismarck, N.D., for his projected titled "Treatment of Clostridioides Difficile with Fecal microbiota Transplantation." His preceptors were Jessica Carlson, M.D., Bismarck, N.D., and Robert Roswick, M.D., Bismarck, N.D.
- Outstanding Scholarly Project, Student Choice: Mitchell Mimbach of Rice, Minn., for his projected titled "The Safety, Accuracy, and Cost-Effectiveness of Confirmatory Penicillin Allergy Testing in the Outpatient Setting as a Means of Reducing Patient Morbidity and Mortality." His preceptors were Jennifer Gannon, PA-C, Albany, Minn., and Luke Herdina, PA-C, Big Lake, Minn.

Class of 2021 Mickey Knutson Scholarship

- Shelby Knox of Ray, N.D. Her preceptor is Jeffrey Moberg, PA-C, of Tioga, N.D.

THANK YOU JUDY KNUTSON

The Department of Physician Assistant Studies would like to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to Judy Knutson, PA-C, for her many years of service as a community faculty member. She began working for the department soon after graduating from the program in 1996. Over the years, Judy has helped students with physical exam labs, clinical testing, case study reports and grading assignments. She recalls sitting in the UND PA lounge preparing to test students while watching the news of the second tower falling during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Thank you Judy for your commitment and dedicated service to PA education!



The Knutson endowment provides scholarships to UND students, allowing them the opportunity to complete their studies and pursue careers in the health field. The Knutson endowment is awarded to a graduate who will be working in primary care in a rural or underserved area.

Class of 2021 Katherine Maryann Rasmussen Scholarship

- Heidi Artz of West Fargo, N.D. Her preceptor is Dustin Hager, PA-C, of Rugby, N.D.
- Rebecca Beyer of Casselton, N.D. Her preceptor is Jared Marquardt, M.D., of Grafton, N.D.
- Ben DeVries of Hibbing, Minn. His preceptor is Amanda McDonald, M.D., of Hibbing, Minn.
- Aunica Novacek of Greenbush, Minn. Her preceptor is Ronald Brummer, M.D., of Roseau, Minn.
- Jenna Zwiers of Nelson, Minn. Her preceptor is Ryan Kroll, M.D., of Staples, Minn.

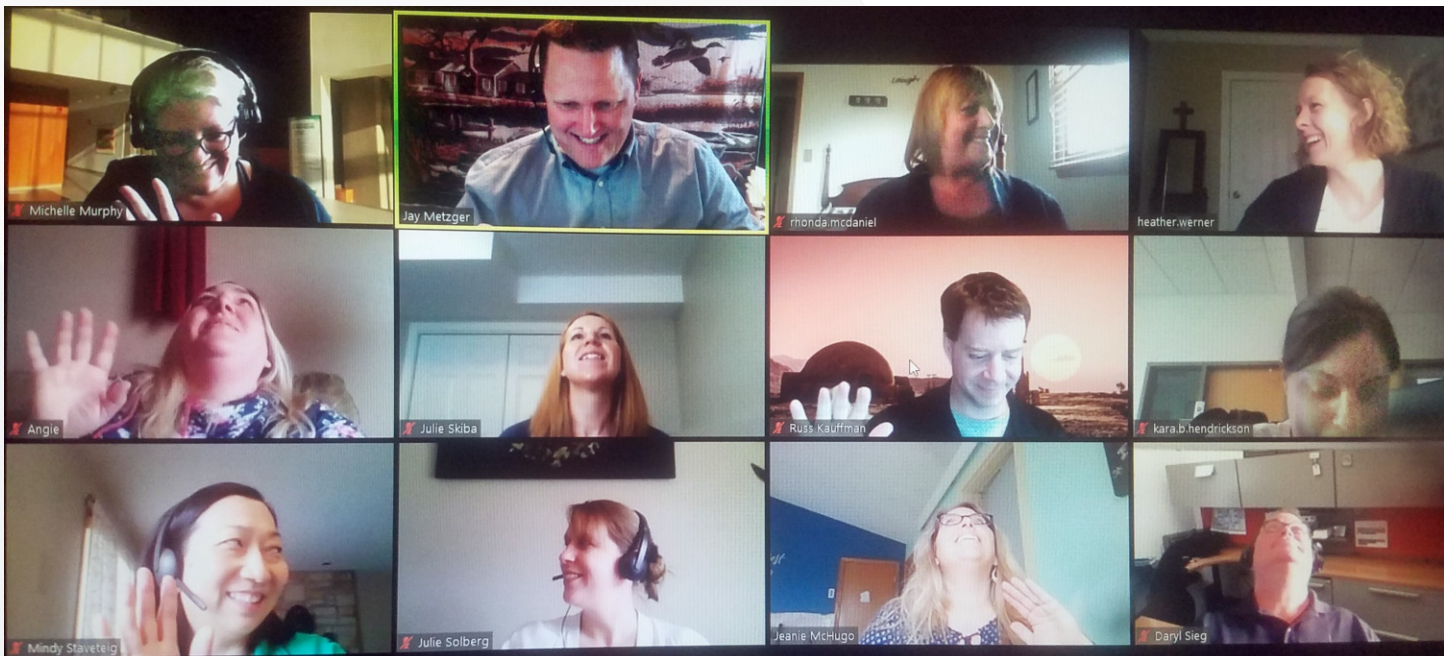
The Rasmussen endowment provides scholarships to one or more high-achieving and qualified students enrolled within the Physician Assistant Program at the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences. Recipients shall be of high moral character and demonstrate the potential to lead successful lives and careers.

ALUMNI

Alumni, we want to hear from you! Where are you practicing now? Accomplishments to announce? Great memories from PA school to share? We'd love to print your news and photos in a future newsletter. Contact us at UND.med.paprogram@UND.edu. Thank you for continuing to make us proud.



DPAS BUNCH



Here's the story
Of a lovely department
Which was busy during COVID-19

The DPAS bunch
the DPAS bunch
that's the way we became the DPAS bunch!

SERVICE THE COMMUNITY



Students from the Class of 2020 give their time to the Northlands Rescue Mission (September 2019).

CLASS OF 2021

LEARN FROM ATHLETIC TRAINING



Christina Rasanen and Sierra Baxter participate in a knee lab with Athletic Training (January 2020)

50TH ANNIVERSARY

Help us celebrate 50 years of UND PA program.
There are many ways you can join in the celebration!*

Friday, Oct. 9

Continuing Education Symposium

8:30–11:30 a.m.

Via Zoom

Topic: Virtual Care During COVID-19
(educational credits available)

SMHS Building Tour

We will provide a link allowing you to take a virtual tour of the SMHS building.

Milestone Program

7 p.m.

Via Zoom

Join us in celebrating 50 years of our Physician Assistant Studies Program (formerly MedEx and the Family Nurse Practitioner Program), as well as milestone alumni of the classes of 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010!

Saturday, Oct. 10

Homecoming parade, plus football and hockey games

*Due to COVID-19, these events are subject to change. Please refer to med.UND.edu/events/homecoming for further updates.

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WELCOME, CLASS OF 2022!



On May 18, the DPAS welcomed thirty-six new students to the program. We look forward to seeing the students this fall!

