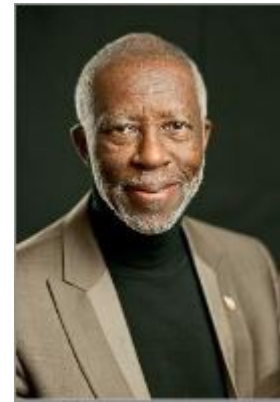


From MAC to AHC: The History of the Minority Affairs Committee to the African Heritage Caucus

By John J. Davis, PA-C, DFAAPA

The AAPA Minority Affairs Committee: A Beginning for Sustainability

The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination against black Americans, and the 1965 passage of the Medicare, Medicaid Acts, which prohibited federal funds from being dispensed to segregated hospitals, were major incentives to include minorities at all levels of medical training and delivery. Acknowledging these historic events, the AAPA created the Minority Affairs Committee (MAC). The first national MAC meeting was held in New Orleans at the AAPA's 1974 Annual Conference.



It all began in a broom closet; a closet located down a hallway, around a corner, away from most of the other hotel traffic; a closet not built for people but for brooms, mops, cleaning rags, equipment, and soaps. The odor of cleaning fluids, dirty mops and open detergent containers covered the closet like a molded blanket. One small dirt and oil stained grimy door served as our entrance to our first meeting space, no windows to determine day, night, rain or bright sunlight; no air-conditioning to alleviate the New Orleans blistering temperature. This unnamed, unnumbered closet was the MAC's first ever assigned meeting space, located in The Monteleone, a major meeting hotel.

Joyce Nichols, a founding member of the AAPA and a member of the AAPA Board, was appointed chairperson of the newly formed MAC. Ms. Nichols was also the first female graduate from a PA Program. Joyce, for those who met her, was a proud, beautiful black woman with spirit to match. She was at least 5'10" with skin the color of African volcanic soil, dark and smooth; hair that matched the roots of Acacia trees; a booming voice which she wielded at will—a voice that demanded



Nichols and Steve Turnipseed

attention. She was smart, empathetic, witty, a friend or foe for life. Joyce had developed a good working relationship with the other organizers of the AAPA. She was well-aware of what needed to be done. She did not complain or voice wonderment about why this closet was our meeting place. The rest of us joked and laughed about it and the broom closet soon became our organizational “rally cry.” We all knew that the MAC was something bigger than any one of us or the broom closet.

Joyce called the meeting to order. The room was quiet. Everyone was ready to see, hear and learn from everyone else. Members in the room included Molly Robinson, Earnestine Campbell, Percy Golson, Ruth Webb, Earl Echard, Steve Turnipseed and me.

Our chair talked about her personal struggles, including living in public housing with her husband and children, before, during and after her graduation from the Duke PA Program. She told us about having to work part-time while attending PA classes part-time. She knew there were doubts by some about her ability to perform and to complete the program. However, she was proud to be speaking to us as a graduate PA and proud of her PA job, providing care to low-income patients in rural North Carolina.



Joyce used her personal struggles and prominent successes to instill in each of us the concept that we must become the caretakers of all people, not just the affluent. She stressed that we must be concerned not only about our financial benefits, but also be willing to address the issues of those less fortunate because that is what Dr. Eugene A. Stead (who developed the first PA program) and Dr. Richard Smith (who developed the first MEDEX program) would want us to do.

In the meeting everyone had an opportunity to speak. We talked about our lives leading up to our entry into the PA/MEDEX Programs. We discussed our struggles, successes, goals and objectives for the PA profession. We talked of families, friends and colleagues, as well as our patients back home.

We knew that to face the future successfully we needed to have goals. Goals require organization. Goals solidify an organization’s purpose and direction. So, we began to realize our goals by organizing the Minority Affairs Committee

membership and assigning specific duties and responsibilities. We elected a secretary, treasurer and membership committee. The goals of the MAC included increasing:

- minority participation in the MAC by sharing phone numbers and addresses.
- diverse applicants and graduates from each PA and MEDEX program.
- the voice of the MAC throughout the profession by members becoming active in their state and local chapters.

After several hours the meeting was adjourned. The energy was still too strong! No one left.

The AAPA Minority Affairs Committee: Beginning for Sustainability –The 1970s

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times” (Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities), but we were not afraid.

From the first national meeting of the AAPA Minority Affairs Committee in a Montelone Hotel broom closet in 1974, to the end of the 1970s, the Minority Affairs Committee had a major role and significant impact on all aspects of the PA profession. It was the worst of times because each of us realized that we had a long and rocky road ahead. Many Vietnam War veterans were returning with an assortment of physical and emotional illnesses, catastrophic injuries and drug addictions. Also, there was a dramatic increase in the number of new patients coming into the health care system due to the recently passed Medicare Act. Many of those patients had virtually no prior access to effective health care. Many were low income blacks and whites.

It was the best of times because when President Johnson signed the Medicare Act he essentially outlawed discrimination in health care delivery. The Act brought millions of additional patients into clinics and hospitals. Grants were given to establish and maintain additional PA Programs to assist in the large influx of patients.

The 1970s Minority Affairs Committee, pushing for equality, was blessed with knowledgeable and extremely competent leadership in its committee chairs, committee members and volunteers. MAC members dove into all aspects of responsibilities to ensure that the job was well done.

Joyce Nichols (charter Board member) and Steve Turnipseed (appointed Board member) had served on the AAPA board of directors in the 1960s. They were the first ones to lead the MAC in the mid-1970s. Earl Echard served as MAC chair in the late 1970s.

Joyce's leadership skills as MAC chair (as mentioned in the winter newsletter) were legendary. Steve Turnipseed followed Joyce as MAC chair. Steve is the kind of person who would stop you in the hallway at the conference and tell you where the MAC meetings were being held. He just expected you to be there. It was more of a command than an invitation. Steve continued to structure the committee and began the process of increasing minority participation in all levels of the profession.

Sometimes you meet and have an opportunity to get to know someone whom you just cannot praise enough. Earl Echard is one of those people. Earl accepted the MAC chair position after Steve and served throughout the remaining years of the 1970s.

Under Earl's leadership, the MAC established its first newsletter with assistance from other PAs: Jose Alfaro, Altheal Ware, Karen Valentine, Yvette Thomas, Earnestine Campbell, Ruth Webb and Molly Robinson. One of Earl's major accomplishments was to acquire increased funding for the MAC. The MAC also began a very successful campaign to place qualified minorities on other AAPA committees. William Davis, Joe Tate, Mose Jennings, Phoebe Matthews, Joe Wigfall and others (including me) served on various AAPA committees including Membership, Elections, CME, and reference committees of the HOD.



Charlie Huntington, Clara Vanderbilt, Noel McFarlane, Bill Conner and Johns Davis

The many leadership accomplishments influenced by the MAC during the 70s include:

1. I became first African American to be nationally elected to the AAPA BOD.
2. Wendell Wharton became PA Student Secretary and Student Liaison to the AAPA Board.
3. Prentiss Harrison continued trailblazing as the first African American PA.
4. I became one of three Charter Members of the Florida Academy.

5. Earl Echard served on the NCCPA Eligibility Committee, Editorial Board of PA Journal and AMA's Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation Site Review Committee.
6. Margaret Islen and Noel McFarline served on the Legislative and Government Affairs Committee.

These accomplishments represent the best of times. Even better is that the individuals named in this article represent only a small percentage of PAs who contributed and made a difference. We are indebted to each of them.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T.: That Is What It Means to Me (Aretha Franklin)

Respect is what PAs, especially minority PAs, across the country were experiencing in the '80s. An ever-growing number of physicians, nurses, educators, the media and the public were becoming aware of physician assistants (PAs), their training, responsibilities and dedication. As awareness and knowledge of PAs grew, respect for the profession grew.



Respect for the Minority Affairs Committee (MAC) members came about because we had become more of a family than a committee. The committee had a welcoming feel because all racial and ethnic groups were accepted and expected to be productive committee members. We were able to increase the number of minority PAs on committees and boards throughout AAPA. MAC effectively lobbied for funds and other AAPA support to enable member travel to meetings and other projects as we set forth a progressive agenda to increase services to underserved communities.

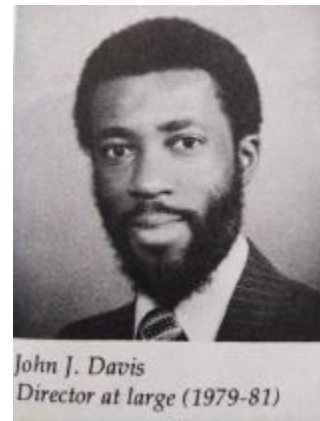
Underserved communities included Vietnam War era veterans, who returned home with mental health and addiction issues. Minority PAs were there to serve them. There were growing numbers of trauma cases in emergency rooms as a result of gang violence in low-income areas. PAs were there to meet the needs of those patients. There was a dramatic increase in low-income people, especially in young black men, who were being sent to prison for decades during the "War on Drugs" and "Three Strikes You Are Out" government policies. We were



well aware that studies had already indicated that African American PAs would be more likely to serve in low-income communities, prisons and other areas of need in less affluent areas of the country. PAs were willing to offer services in those prisons. Because PAs were willing to serve the underserved, PAs were respected.

By 1980, MAC had had six years of planning, progress and successes. We knew that the actions of each MAC member doing his/her best to move the profession and the MAC forward was our best strategy. The MAC was small enough that the majority of African American PAs across the country knew and recognized us.

The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) and the profession were growing, and the MAC wanted to grow with it. Involvement, dedication, innovation and leadership were the keys to accomplishing the goals and objectives of both AAPA and MAC. The MAC knew that we had to have a seat at the table to assist the PA profession and people of color in all of our efforts to move through the entire decade of the '80s and beyond.



Some of the MAC members who helped to bring Respect and push the endeavors of the AAPA, PA profession and the MAC in the '80s included:

- Earl Echard, Carl Toney and Robert Howell—were MAC Chairs
- Felicia Benzo and Brenda Jasper—led Project Access, the community outreach program conducted at the AAPA Annual Conference by the AAPA and APAP MAC
- Linwood Wells, Tei Fellows, Denise Crawford —served as MAC student sub-committee members
- Jessie Jeffrey and Debra Adewale—served as Student MAC alternates/delegates to AAPA HOD
- Wendell Wharton —first African American to serve as Student Academy Secretary in 1978 and he created MAC quiz questionnaire
- Alan Pinckney—was the first African American PA elected as President of an AAPA constituent chapter (Washington, D C)
- Janice Tramel—was the first African American PA to chair a state regulatory/licensing agency, the California PA Board
- Ruth Webb—was the first PA to be appointed Section Council Chair in the American Public Health Association

- John J. Davis –was director-at-large of the AAPA Board of Directors
- Altheal Ware and Deborah Wafer–were active participants in the HIV/Aids prevention, education, pharmaceuticals and treatment in the US and internationally
- Jerry Pettiford –was the first APAP MAC Chair and liaison to the AAPA’s MAC.

These MAC members are just a small sample of the MAC membership and the accomplishments made during the ‘80s. Please email the Society your ‘80s MAC participation and photos to be added to this list and the Society’s collection.

Throughout the decade of the ‘80s, the PA profession and the MAC gained respect and accomplished much. Despite obstacles that had to be tackled and overcome, those achievements motivated actions that were foundations for the succeeding decades of growth and productivity.

The AAPA Minority Affairs Committee: Decade of the ‘90s

“This is how we do it!” This was the mantra that reflected the ideals and attitude among Minority Affairs Committee (MAC)/African American Special Interest Group (AASIG)/African Heritage Caucus (AHC) members during the decade of the ‘90s. We had gone from our first MAC meeting in a space previously used as a conference hotel broom closet in the decade of the ‘70s to gaining national and international respect in the decade of the ‘80s. MAC’s name changes were based on the desires of the American Academy of Physician Assistants(AAPA) and the MAC members. In the ‘90s we were able to tell America and the world that, “This is how we do it.” In the ‘90s, PAs of color made tremendous strides in advancing the PA profession to become the worldwide, international quality health care providers that we are today. We were known from Africa, to the Caribbean, to Canada, to Asia. PAs traveled, provided health care education, and guided the people of the world. African Heritage Caucus members were serving in many professional leadership positions.



Photo Credit: John Davis,
PAs for the Future
“Meeting Is Over”

American Academy of Physician Assistants House of Delegates:

- Wendell Wharton, Secretary, First Vice Speaker, AAPA House of Delegates
- Rebecca Pinto, Delegate representing the constituent organizations of Massachusetts, Ohio and California, AAPA House of Delegates
- Murl Dotson, Delegate representing Mississippi Academy of Physician Assistants
- John Davis, Delegate representing Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants

Board of Directors:

- Robert Howell, Director-at-large, AAPA Board of Directors
- Carl Toney, Director-at-large, AAPA Board of Directors

Committees:

- Peggy Valentine, Chair, AAPA MAC
- Sara Chan Davidson, Chair, AAPA MAC
- Susan Jackson, MAC, Project Access
- Les Howard, Nominating Committee

Special Interest Groups/Caucuses:

- Robin Hunter-Buskey, Moderator, African American Special Interest Group
- Bill Dillard, Moderator, African Heritage Caucus (AHC)
- Stephanie Haiba-Collier, Moderator, AHC
- Delores Middleton, Moderator, AHC
- Theresa King, Editor, The Drum

Constituent Chapters:

- Stephanie Haiba-Collier. Chair, MAC, California Academy of Physician Assistants
- Terry Scott, President, Washington Academy of Physician Assistants
- Joe Tate, Board of Directors, California Academy of Physician Assistants
- Ed Williams, DC Chapter American Academy of Physician Assistants

Liaisons:

- Sharon R. Roland, AAPA Liaison, National Medical Association (NMA)
- Dorothy Singleton, AAPA Liaison, NMA

Award Recipients:

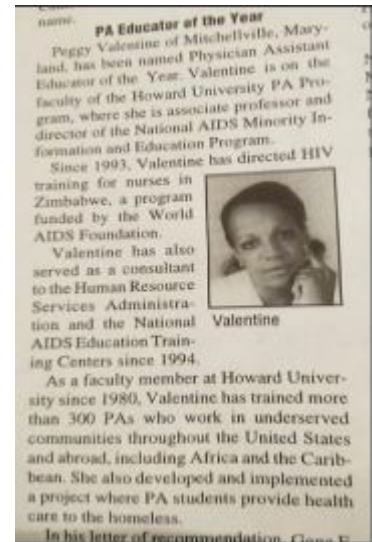
- Nate Alston, AAPA Outstanding PA of the Year
- Murl Dotson, AAPA Public Education Achievement Award
- Peggy A. Valentine, PA Educator of the Year, 1997

Student Academy Assembly of Representatives (AOR):

- Jose Rodriguez, Vice President, AAPA Student Academy; Assembly of Representatives (AOR)
- Charlezetta Roberson, MAC Director, AAPA Student Academy

Physician Assistant Education:

- Ron Garcia, President, APAP Board of Directors
- Dawn Morton-Rias, Vice President, APAP Board of Directors
- Peggy Valentine, Chair, PA Department, Howard University
- Brenda Jasper, Director, PA Program, Howard University
- Stephanie Haywood-Bowlin, Site Visitor, Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA)
- John Davis, Duke University PAP Alumnus of the Year



Other:

- Dorthea Green, Health Service and Education Mission to Haiti

The Decade of the 90s was a time of the ever-growing menace of the unchecked spread of HIV/AIDS, the continuing health care crisis in America and the major injuries of soldiers returning home from the 1st Persian Gulf War. PAs of color saw a continuing increase in involvement in the PA profession. They served as providers, educators, administrators and strong activists in the politics of the profession. AHC PAs held major leadership positions and are credited with helping to enhance the awareness of the capabilities of PAs in the US and around the globe. AHC PAs could proudly say that, “This Is How We Do It.”

Thanks to AAPA Conference Daily and the authors, editors and contributors of “The Drum” Newsletters for their assistance with the information above. If we have omitted your leadership service from the decade of the ‘90s, please notify the author so we may modify the records.

