

Historical Happenings

Newsletter of the PA History Society



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Message from the President

William C. Kohlhepp, DHSc, PA-C Emeritus, DFAAPA



The PA History Society Board of Trustees gathered at the Society’s offices in Johns Creek, Georgia, for its spring board meeting and workshop. The weekend began with a full day strategic planning workshop led by strategic integration expert and best-selling author, Gabriel Eckert, FASAE, CAE. Eckert structured the day to engage the Trustees and staff in very productive small-group and large group sessions focused on building the foundation for the Society’s next three-year strategic plan for

2027-2029. The following day, the Trustees held their board meeting. One of the issues considered by the Board built on a conversation about the impact of generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) that began during their workshop session the day before. The Trustees are currently developing a policy that outlines how the Trustees use generative AI in developing the documents they submit for publication and what the policies will be for accepting materials into the archives that include information created with generative AI tools. As the authoritative source on PA history the PAHx needs to be mindful of the evolving world of generative AI and how the use of these tools will affect the reputation and “ownership” of the materials accepted into the archives and posted to the Society’s website.

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PAssages: Kenneth F. Ferrell, PA

Ken Ferrell, the last of the original three PAs who graduated from the inaugural PA program at Duke University, passed away on March 18, 2026. [Kenneth “Ken” Ferrell](#) graduated from Duke University on October 6, 1967, along with [Victor Germino](#) and [Richard Scheele](#), all former US Navy hospital corpsmen. At age 21, Ferrell was the youngest member of his class and is considered the program’s first PA graduate since the graduation certificates were handed out in alphabetical order. After graduating from the PA program in 1967, Ferrell worked clinically for twenty

years as a pulmonary and allergy specialist in the Department of Medicine at Duke.



Ken Ferrell at the PAHx 20th Anniversary Reception, 2022

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(President's Message Continued from Page 1)

Almost immediately after staff closed the weekend meeting, they turned their attention to planning for the Society's presence at the AAPA Annual Conference in New Orleans. Staff and Board leadership will be available throughout the conference at the Society's exhibit booth. On Saturday, the Society will be a tabletop exhibitor in the Become a PA: Pre-PA Workshop. At 8:00 am on Monday, the Society will be presenting a CME session titled *Preserving PA History: Pearls and Pitfalls*.

I am pleased with the continuing positive feedback we have been receiving from faculty and students regarding the Society's educational modules. To date, over 1,030 students have enrolled in our online curriculum, *PAs as Social Innovators in Healthcare: The History and Legacy of the PA Profession*. In reviewing those comments, I am confident that the educational modules are the meaningful and effective tool for PA programs that we hoped they would be. Three comments struck a chord with me: ***"Great history lesson and awesome to see how far the profession has come!"***; ***"The delivery was excellent, and I feel like everything taught was useful and relevant to my training as a new PA."***; ***"The content is great. I have better understanding of the history of PA profession."***

I encourage you to read the other interesting articles in this newsletter. I bring your attention to the article (right) written by Nominating Committee Chair Rich Vause on the call for nominations for the Board of Trustees.

The Society has two other Trustee meetings planned in 2026: the summer board meeting in August which is held over Zoom and another in-person meeting in early November. I look forward to reporting on those meetings here in the President's Message.



PAHx Board of Trustees & Staff, 2026

Preserving PA History for Future Generations:

A Call for PAHx Trustee Applications By Rich Vause, Jr., DHSc, MPAS, MMSc, PA-C, FCPP, DFAAPA, CAPT USPH (retired) PAHx Past-President

This year the United States celebrates the 250th year of our independence as a nation on July 4, 1776. We know this because historians recorded the events and the people who surrounded this extraordinary place in time and they also saved the document we know as the Declaration of Independence. Why is this history important? Because it lays the groundwork for the establishment and evolution of the United States of America as we know it today.

That said, **who gathers, records, and archives the history of our profession?** Who safeguards not only the history of the forward-thinking individuals who envisioned, developed and pioneered the establishment of the PA profession, but the history of PAs like you, who have made and are making history every single day? The answer to that question is the PA History Society (PAHx).

Recognized as the preeminent leader in fostering the preservation, study, and presentation of the history of the PA profession, **the mission of the PAHx is to share the history of the development of the PA profession and illustrate how PAs continue to make a difference in our society.** In other words, how we make history every day. Twelve dedicated volunteers form the Board of Trustees of the Society, supported by a historian and three staff members. As a working board, the Trustees are not only responsible for planning the direction and projects of the PAHx but are actively involved in all activities of the Society.

Our Trustee application cycle is now open and we are looking to fill one full-term Trustee position and one annual Student Trustee to begin their board service in January 2027. We are looking for individuals who enjoy writing and are interested in helping contribute to the important work of capturing and preserving the history that PAs are making today.

Trustee applications are being accepted through August 15, 2026. For more information about the Trustee responsibilities and how to apply, please visit our [website](#).

Next year we will celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the PAHx, and as past president of the Society, I take great pleasure in extending this invitation to you to send in your board application today!

Federal Rule Excludes PA Programs: The GMENAC of Our Age?

Tricia Marriott, PA-C, MPAS, MJ, DFAAPA PAHx Historian

On April 30, 2026, the U.S. Department of Education published a Final Rule codifying the definition of professional degree programs eligible for up to \$50,000 annual federal student loans. The “[Reimagining and Improving Student Education](#)” (RISE) rule specifically excludes the PA degree from the list of those eligible for the maximum annual loan. Effective July 1, 2026, by delineating PA programs as *graduate* programs, rather than *professional* programs, the rule establishes an annual borrowing cap of \$20,500 for PA students. With 80% of new PA graduates reporting accumulated debt of greater than \$50,000, and 63.8% reporting accumulated debt of greater than \$100,000¹, this rule has the potential to severely limit the pool of applicants able to pursue a PA degree.

“The Department declines to include PA programs as professional degree programs.”

The AAPA and PAEA are [planning to fight the rule in federal court](#). The impact of this rule is anticipated to further exacerbate the healthcare workforce shortage, not only for PAs, but also for advanced practice registered nurses (NP, CNM, CNS and CRNA) who are also excluded from the maximum \$50,000 in annual federal loans. In response to concerns voiced by commenters, the Department of Education states “...we do not believe that the potential for reduced access or workforce shortages is relevant in how we interpret the term professional student” and “...there is nothing in the operative definition or the illustrative list that would suggest that Congress wanted the Department to consider workforce shortages.”

The PA History Society will be following this legislation closely, as we remember the negative impact² the 1980 Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) Report³ had on the PA profession for nearly a decade, essentially halting the development of new PA programs and causing others to close. This new rule, if implemented as written, just might be the GMENAC of the new millennium.

To that end, AAPA President Todd Pickard’s message on April 30, 2026, asks all PAs to [contact their members of Congress](#) to endorse The Professional Student Degree Act (H.R. 6718), which would codify into law the definition of “professional degree” to include PAs.

¹ https://www.nccpa.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2023-Recently-certified_10_29_24.pdf

National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, Inc. (2024, September). 2023 Statistical Profile of Recently Board Certified Physician Assistants: An Annual Report of the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, p.14 <https://doi.org/10.64936/CJRE1020>

² Cawley, James F. MPH, PA-C. The GMENAC report and the PA profession. *Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants* 29(10):p 49-52, October 2016. | DOI: 10.1097/01.JAA.0000499630.59622.f6

³ [ED203771.pdf](#)

(Passages Continued from Page 1)

He left clinical practice to become an administrative manager with Duke’s Private Diagnostic Clinic (PDC), where he worked for another 20 years. Ferrell was inducted into the Duke PA Program’s Alumni Hall of Fame in 2009 and was then recognized again at a special ceremony during the Duke University PA Program’s 60th anniversary in 2025.



Ferrell outside NPR Durham Studio, 2017

A strong advocate of the PA profession for nearly 60 years, Ferrell attended many PA conferences and events after he retired. Below are a few of his speeches and interviews that you may watch/listen to:

- ◆ To watch Mr. Ferrell’s speech at the 20th anniversary celebration of the PA History Society in 2022, please [click here](#).
- ◆ To listen to an audio only interview between Mr. Ferrell and Vic Germino in 2005, [click here](#).

Several Opportunities to Connect with PAHx During AAPA



We hope you'll stop by the PAHx booth during AAPA in New Orleans! Pick up fun swag, learn about our educational modules, check out our books, and enter our random drawing for three special PAHx gift packs! The **PAHx booth will be located outside Hall E on the ground level of the convention center** from Friday, May 15th through Tuesday, May 19th.

The Society will also have a **booth at the AAPA pre-PA session** on Saturday, May 16 from 8am – 3pm, in the Hilton Hotel St. Charles Ballroom. Tell your friends who are considering a PA career to stop by the pre-PA session and learn about the history of the profession at our PAHx booth.

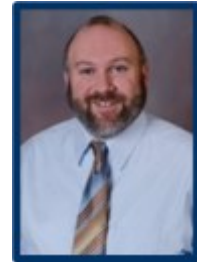
Join our **PAHx CME session on Monday, May 18th, at 8am in Room 340 at the convention center.** *Preserving PA History: Pearls and Pitfalls* will help history lovers know where to start, how to preserve on a budget, and creative

ways to share history with your stakeholders. **Space is limited, so please RSVP for this PAHx small-group session on the [AAPA conference website or app](#).**

Plan to share your PA story with PAHx while at AAPA too!

Look for our PAHx Trustee and Communications Chair [Jeff Myers](#), MPH, MMSc, PA-C, DFAAPA, FAAHPM, who will be serving as the Society's roving reporter during the conference. Jeff will be recording short clips from attendees because all **PA's are making history every day!**

The PA History Society looks forward to seeing everyone at AAPA 2026! If you have any questions about the Society's activities, please feel free to [contact us](#).



Trustee Jeff Myers

Donate to Our Collections... to Preserve PA History!

If you have PA materials and artifacts that you'd like donate to the PAHx, please email a list of the items you wish to donate to: contactus@pahx.org. Our Senior Archivist, Michelle Schabowski, is always looking for special PA treasures to add to our archives and showcase on our website and in our displays at the NCCPA-PAHx headquarters.



**In Her Own Words:
Stephanie Gilkey, EdD, MS, PA-C,
DFAAPA**

*By Bruna Varalli-Claypool, BBA, MHS,
PA-C, DFAAPA, PAHx Trustee*

Stephanie Gilkey is program director of the University of Michigan—Flint PA Program and a new board member of the PA History Society Board of Trustees.



You have a long history with the PA Education Association (PAEA). How do you account for your longevity with the organization?

I've remained involved with PAEA because it continually offers opportunities to learn and contribute. It's grown with our profession into an organization that supports PA educators and education in so many ways, expanding our professional lives beyond our programs. It provides resources, advocates on faculty and student's behalf, and fosters both professional and personal connections. I know this sounds like an ad for PAEA, but it really is a great organization! I truly value the colleagues and friends I've made through the committees that I have served on. Attending the annual forums has given me the chance to stay current in PA education and of course, see my friends!

What do you do for fun?

Travel, especially to see my children in New York and London. It is something I cherish. I also enjoy cooking, reading, gardening and finding some downtime to just sit and think whenever my schedule allows.



Stephanie Gilkey and family in Italy for vacation.

Best vacation?

Each trip has been unique. Favorites include Hawaii right before the pandemic, and memorable experiences in England, France and Italy for their history, beauty, and fantastic food.

What is the Warrior College Experience?

Wayne State University's "Warrior" experience is all about learning in the heart of Detroit. The PA program is in an urban setting, giving students access to major healthcare systems and the unique energy of the city. During my twenty-plus years at WSU, I saw firsthand how students benefited from Detroit's academic opportunities, rich culture, and vibrant community life. Since 2018, I've been with the University of Michigan-Flint, but my experiences at Wayne State continue to shape my perspective of PA education in an urban setting.



If you could have a superpower, what would it be and why?

If I could have a superpower, I would choose the ability to eliminate poverty. Plain and simple. No one would go hungry, and everyone would have a safe place to live if they wanted it. To me, providing for basic needs would empower people to thrive and focus on living their lives, rather than just survival.

What is the title of the last book you read?

The last book I read was *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. Actually, it was my second time reading it. I find this book so inspiring because it's rich with meaning and encourages self-reflection. Both times I read it I discovered new insights about personal growth, following dreams, and recognizing the value in life's journey. It's the kind of story that stays with you and prompts you to pause and really think about its messages.

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(In Her Words Continued from Page 5)

How has PA education changed since you began as an educator?

Technology has transformed everything. I started with DOS computers and paper handouts assembled by hand. What a relief when Windows came to be! Now, of course, we live in a very different world, and resources are so much more accessible. It is so much easier now to bring topics to life for the student, assess student learning, and generate and disseminate materials.



Gilkey (Left), Henry Ford Neurology Team,

Did you imagine becoming a PA educator when you began PA school?

No, my initial goal was to become a clinician. It was only after I started precepting students that I developed a real interest in PA education. This curiosity led me to pursue a Master's in Health Care Administration and Education, and eventually a

Doctorate in Educational Evaluation and Research. Interestingly, my career has come full circle. When I was a child, I dreamed of being a teacher one day.



If money were not an issue, where would you retire?

Hawaii. It's beautiful, and I'd be able to visit my family wherever they are, since money is not an issue!

As a PA educator at Wayne State University, you were involved in the PA HealthPro Start Honors Program. Tell us about that.

The program was a pipeline partnership between Wayne State University (WSU) and Oakland University (OU). The program offered early admission to WSU's PA program for selecting undergraduate honors students from OU, (which didn't have a PA program at the time). I helped plan and implement the program as I was PA program director at the time.

Dogs or cats?

Definitely dogs.

**From the Archives:
The John Davis Collection**

John Davis graduated from Duke University in 1973. He was a founding member of the AAPA Minority Affairs Committee and has worked to advocate the PA profession his entire



From left to right: John Davis, Althea Lewis, and Earl Echard, undated

career. Davis is also a former board member of the NCCPA and the PA History Society. To learn more about John Davis, please visit his [biography](#) on our website.

[The John Davis Collection](#) in the PA History Society Archives is invaluable to those doing research in the Minority Affairs Committee. The collection also highlights notable names in the PA profession such as Ruth Webb, who was the first Black woman to become a PA program director, and Karen Bass, the first PA to become a U.S. representative.

The John Davis Collection also includes enough photographs to create their own distinct archival collection.

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Palliative Care PA and Voice Actor: Donna M. Seton, PA-C

By Jeff Myers, MPH, MMSc, PA-C, DFAAPA
PAHx Trustee

With the recent release of the new PA History Society online curriculum, *PAs as Social Innovators: The History and Legacy of the PA Profession*, there's an extra special surprise.



The person and story behind the voice!

Palliative care and chief PA at the Phoenix Veterans Health Administration, Donna Seton's journey into voiceover began long before it became a professional focus, rooted in her early passion for performance. She initially pursued a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting Performance, building a foundation in storytelling and vocal expression. After three semesters, Seton shifted to medical technology, choosing a more practical career path, while still carrying forward the communication skills developed through her theater training.

Her introduction to voiceover came in the mid-1990s through a chance encounter at a jazz brunch. There, she met a local NPR DJ who, after hearing Seton's interest in voice work, connected her with a voiceover coach and studio owner. Seton enrolled in classes and began developing her first demo tape at a time when voiceover demos were still recorded on cassettes. During this training period, she received her first paid opportunity, voicing content for a small cell phone provider in the southeastern United States. This early success marked her entry into professional voice acting.

Soon after, Seton was accepted into physician assistant school, and her voiceover pursuits were placed on hold as she focused on her medical career. Years later, in 2019, she returned to voice acting with renewed intention, enrolling in a comprehensive training program. This experience allowed her to refine her voice as a professional instrument, revisit her acting

roots, and gain modern technical skills. She learned audio production and editing, developed marketing strategies, built a home studio capable of broadcast-quality sound, and produced updated commercial and narration demos. With a professional website and active networking, she began auditioning for roles through casting platforms and agencies.

Her dual identity as both a certified PA and a voice actor came together in a meaningful way when she learned that the PA History Society was developing an online curriculum titled *PAs as Social Innovators: The History and Legacy of the PA Profession*.

Recognizing the unique opportunity to contribute to her own profession, Seton described the experience as serendipitous. She was selected to provide voice narration for the modules, bringing clarity, warmth, and authenticity to the material for PA students.

Through this work, Seton not only applied her voiceover expertise but also deepened her own understanding of the PA profession's history. She takes pride in knowing that her voice helps educate future PAs, ensuring that the legacy of innovation and service within the profession continues to be recognized and appreciated.

(From the Archives Continued from page 6)

The [John Davis Still Image Collection](#) shows the evolution of the PA profession through photographs taken during the annual AAPA conferences. The photographs include PAs important



Brenda Jasper, 1992

advancement of the AAPA's initiative to grow diversity within the profession. Joyce Nichols, the first female PA, makes appearances as does Earl Echardt, Les Howard and Brenda Jasper.

PAHx in Hospice and Palliative Medicine Celebrate 15th Anniversary

By Jeff Myers, MPH, MMSc, PA-C, DFAAPA, PAHx Trustee

The PA Constituent Organization (CO) Physician Associates in Hospice and Palliative Medicine (PAHPM) celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Since the mid-1990s, PAs have been acknowledging the role they play in serious-illness care, palliative medicine, and even hospice. In many rural areas, PAs such as [Elizabeth “Libby” Coyte](#) and her husband [Ed Friedman](#) were already leading the way and advocating for PAs to have more recognition and acceptance into the palliative medicine and hospice fields.

Starting in 2009, the Accreditation Review Commission on Education of Physician Assistants (ARC-PA) mandated end-of-life education in palliative and hospice care be part of PA student curriculum. That same year, PAs officially established a special interest group within the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM), the leading organization for healthcare professionals in the U.S. within the fields of palliative medicine and hospice care.

In 2011, the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) officially recognized the development of the CO, PAHPM, and thus PAs officially had a home within their home recognizing the work they were doing. By 2015, the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) formally began tracking PAs practicing in hospice and palliative medicine. PAHPM leaders and members have continued to grow over the years, finding themselves seats at the table with national leaders in their field, advocating for PAs caring for patients and families experiencing serious illness, and trying to bridge the continued gaps in recognition of PAs within hospice care itself.

By 2019, their advocacy led to the Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act, which included provisions for PAs to be listed as hospice attendings and reimbursed by Medicare. As gaps remain, PAHPM continues to work to close those and advocate for PAs. Thanks to PAHPM leaders, the NCCPA now offers a Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) in Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care, recognizing those practicing in the specialty and those PAs wanting to advance and recognize their skills in serious-illness care.

PAHPM is not only advocating for PAs but also promoting education programs. In 2018, PAHPM and the California State University Shiley Haynes Institute for Palliative Care partnered to create the first PA-specific hospice and palliative medicine CME program and certificate for PAs, by PAs. PAHPM members continue to produce texts, journal articles, and research which show that *PAs Can Do That!*, including Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care.

To celebrate its anniversary and many of its founding and early contributing leaders, PAHPM will be holding a special event during this year’s AAPA Annual Conference in New Orleans, on Sunday, May 17th, at 6:30 p.m. They will celebrate with a Lifetime Achievement Award Ceremony open to all, and celebrate 15 amazing years with some remarkable current and future PAs in palliative medicine and hospice care. Check out the conference schedule for location details and stop by the PAHPM booth in the exhibitor hall to congratulate them on making PA history!

You can learn more about PAs in palliative care and those who are making history at [PAHPM website](#), or visit the article in the [Journal of Pain and Symptom Management](#), which highlights the history and needed inclusion of PAs in hospice and palliative medicine.



The Symbolic Debate: Caduceus vs. Rod of Asclepius in PA Programs

By *Reginald Carter, PhD, PA, Historian Emeritus*



The PA History Society archive contains a large collection of student patches that are available to view [online](#). Of the 137 patches shown, 56 (41%) have no symbol related to the traditional symbols used to represent medicine, i.e. the Caduceus or the Rod of Asclepius. Forty-seven (34%) of the patches contain the Rod of Asclepius symbol while thirty-four (25%) have the Caduceus symbol. The symbols used to represent medical professions carry deep historical and cultural significance. Among these, the Caduceus and the Rod of Asclepius are often at the center of debate regarding their appropriate use in medical contexts, particularly within physician associate (PA) programs. This article will briefly examine the origins, meanings, and controversies surrounding both symbols, with a focus on their adoption by PA programs.

The Caduceus, a winged staff with two snakes, is linked to the Greek God of Commerce, Hermes. The Rod of Asclepius, with one snake, represents the Greek God of Medicine, Asclepius. Though both date back to ancient Greece, only the Rod of Asclepius is truly tied to healing. The U.S. Army Medical Corps popularized the Caduceus as a medical symbol in the 20th century, likely due to confusion and its visual appeal, but historians argue it is less appropriate for medicine because of its commercial associations.

The Rod of Asclepius, with its singular serpent and staff, has been regarded as the authentic emblem of medicine and healing since ancient times. Medical organizations, including the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association, employ the Rod of Asclepius to signify their dedication to health and patient care. While it is no longer in use, the American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) incorporated the Rod of Asclepius within its initial emblem to symbolize the role of PAs in medicine.



Some PA programs use the Caduceus, while others choose the Rod of Asclepius to reflect their commitment to medical and ethical values. Both symbols are widely used throughout healthcare and carry significant meaning.

Resources:

What's in a Symbol. The Chapman Society, University of Florida College of Medicine. Accessed on April 20, 2026 at: [What's in a Symbol » The Chapman Society » College of Medicine » University of Florida](#)

Bohigian G. The Caduceus vs. Staff of Aesculapius - One Snake or Two? *Mo Med*. 2019 Nov-Dec;116(6):476-477. PMID: 31911724; [PMCID: PMC6913859](#).

Don't forget to check out the [Society's website](#) regularly for "all things PA history", including:

- **442 inspiring biographies**
- **270 oral history interviews**
- **179 videos**
- **2,500 photographs**
- **and much more!**



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PA HISTORY SOCIETY

Gain access to the Society's **NEW** online curriculum resources for teaching the history of the PA profession.



ADDITIONAL ASSOCIATE BENEFITS:

- *Historian resources providing guidance in documenting and preserving your PA program's own history and milestones.*
- *Access to the Celebration Planner to aid in organizing your special milestone celebrations.*
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Scan the QR code to see if your PA program is an Associate:





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