

CHARTINGS

Physician Assistant Special Issue



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Physician Assistant Week: Celebrating PAs Nationwide



Physician Assistant Week, which occurs every year between October 6 and 12, is dedicated to celebrating the Physician Assistant (PA) profession across the country. Started by the [American Academy of Physician Assistants](#), PA Week is a tradition that raises both understanding and awareness of the profession, and promotes healthy lifestyle choices for all. PA Week is observed this week throughout the nation; events range from local health fairs and blood drives to walk-a-thons and fitness tests. Many Physician Assistants and PA groups arrange networking meetings and community health events at this time of the year. This special edition of *Chartings* honors the dedicated leaders, expert faculty, accomplished alumni, and altruistic students who make up the oldest, largest Physician Assistant Program in the city of Philadelphia: ours! Please join the College in recognizing PA Week.

For more information about national PA Week, click [here](#).

Drexel's PA Program Returns to its Roots



Military students Cash, left and Kim, right.

The Physician Assistant profession developed during the 1940s when United States military personnel returned from World War II with hands-on medical experience in the field but without a formal education or degree that would allow them to practice on civilians. The first PA curriculum was created by Dr. Eugene Stead, Jr. of Emory University in 1942, though after it was approved by an academic committee, the curriculum was implemented at Duke University's Medical Center in 1965. When the first four Physician Assistants graduated on October 6, 1967, Duke University hosted a national conference to bring organization and standardization of program curricula to the PA profession. Years later, to commemorate this milestone in Physician Assistant history, October 6 was coined "National PA

Day” by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA).

Established in 1971 at Hahnemann University, the Physician Assistant Program of the Drexel College of Nursing and Health Professions is the oldest program of its kind in the city of Philadelphia. The program is dedicated to providing exceptional hands-on education for its students and remains connected to the tradition that the profession is rooted in by training both veterans and active military personnel.

“The PA profession developed when men came back from the war with medical skills from the field but without a degree to practice on civilians. The first PAs were male, second career veterans,” said Adrian Banning, a clinical instructor in the PA Department. Today, the average Physician Assistant student in the United States is an early-20s female who transitions directly from her undergraduate institution to an accredited Physician Assistant program, sometimes taking a year or two in-between to do community service work. “That’s great,” Adrian continued, “But now especially with many veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan with so much medical knowledge and experience, we should bring them to the profession so that we can share knowledge bases.”

Several of the PA Department’s faculty members are part of a regional work group that discusses veteran PA training and works to develop recruiting strategies to draw veterans and members of the military to the profession. “There should be cohesive resources available to strengthen the profession,” Adrian said. “Instead of individualized efforts to include veterans, there should be some collective effort.” The PA Program at the College educates veterans, members of the military with ongoing reserve commitments, as well as students who have signed on to serve in the military after they graduate. Drexel University as a whole is what’s known as a *yellow ribbon school*, meaning that Drexel will match military funding for tuition. The University also has an Office of Veteran Services where veteran students can go to receive assistance with their transition into academia. Adrian said that PA students who enter the program after military service often use this resource. Finally, our PA Program is unique in that it offers a part-time option, an alternative that is particularly valuable for military personnel with ongoing commitments and families to care for who need flexibility in order to complete the program and earn the degree.

“Our veteran students contribute to the classroom a lot because they bring maturity and discipline. Especially for the very young students, the veterans bring clinical and practical background knowledge that benefits everyone in the classroom. The veterans are also an example of professionalism; they act as role models and we value the service they’ve given to our country,” said Dr. Daniela Livingston, an assistant clinical professor in the PA Department.

It’s all About the Mission

The mission of PA Department at the College of Nursing and Health Professions is twofold: to educate Physician Assistants to work in medically underserved areas and to promote the PA profession.

Faculty members unanimously share that their students are looking for ways to volunteer or get involved in efforts to serve low-income, rural, or medically underserved communities from the day they first walk through the door. The College’s PA Program has cultivated a strong service focus and therefore draws a certain type of person to apply, a person who is service-minded, compassionate, and committed to helping people in need. Because this program is the oldest in the city, the Department has formed many relationships with local agencies and health care organizations in rural and urban settings, allowing students to gain exposure to different settings during a variety of clinical rotation opportunities. Rosalie Coppola and Gretchen Fox, who have been teaching in the program for two

decades, said “We’ve been around here long enough to see the evolution of the program. Because, as a program, we’ve been around so long, we have long-term relationships with preceptors. We have rotations that have been around for quite some time and are well-established. We have many graduates out there working as PAs, too.”

Both faculty and students promote the profession as much as possible, always keeping that piece of their mission in mind as they progress through their careers. For example, a group of faculty members traveled together to the Walter Reid Center in Bethesda, Maryland, to talk with active members of the military about options they have to become a Physician Assistant in the future. Current students are involved in the interview process for future PA classes, which not only generates helpful feedback for faculty decision makers, but also allows students to advocate for the profession and talk to the incoming class about their choice to become a Physician Assistant. “There’s a sense of responsibility instilled in the student because we see them as very involved and invested in the future of the program and the profession. This ties directly to our mission to promote the profession as much as possible,” said Julie Kinzel, a PA Department instructor.

“Our mission speaks a lot to the type of students we tend to draw,” she continued. “Our goal is to serve the medically underserved and the work of our Student Society shows the students’ commitment to that philosophy or that mission.”

The Student Perspective



Lauren Weaver, PA '13



Scott Naples, PA '13

“This program felt like a good fit and the faculty was very approachable. I think they do a good job at emphasizing taking what you learned in class and translating it to the clinical experience,” said Lauren Weaver, a member of the Physician Assistant Class of 2013. Lauren will be completing the first part of her clinical experience in the Lehigh Valley area in the psychology department of an organization called Kid’s Peace. Her clinical work following Kid’s Peace will have a surgical focus and take place at Saint Luke’s. “I’m really excited to see patients and put all the puzzle pieces together. I’ll finally get to apply my knowledge,” Lauren shared. After these two rotations, Lauren will have accumulated the requisite 15 months of clinical experience she needs to graduate. Lauren also serves in the role of Vice President for the Wilbur W. Oaks Students Society. Since she was elected to the position last September, she has collaborated closely with the Student Society’s President, Scott Naples, to fundraise for the Children’s Crisis Treatment Center in Philadelphia. Their efforts have included organizing a blood drive, multiple happy hours at local watering holes, and a Lia Sophia Jewelry party.

Scott Naples, a Philadelphia native and a member of the Class of 2013, chose Drexel's PA Program for many reasons. Coming from a family where many members served in the Army or Navy, Scott decided he wanted to have the same experience that his relatives had always spoken highly of. Upon choosing Drexel, he soon entered a rigorous application process to receive a scholarship from the Navy that would cover his tuition, include a stipend, and pay for his books each quarter. Scott was one of only three individuals who received the scholarship. "It's been difficult for me to choose a specialty, but right now I am thinking about emergency medicine or surgery," Scott told us. After graduation, he will have to complete three years of service in the Navy. "I'm open to working on a naval base anywhere in Europe or Asia," he added.

"This is different than other student populations," Professor Nina Multak said of the student body's diversity and teamwork. "They come here from all over the country. They come here as individuals. When they come here they collaborate, they're support systems for each other both socially and academically. They become like family to each other. Because of their personalities it perpetuates a family-like atmosphere." Other PA Program instructors agree that the students are self-motivated, generous, and willing to help one another. "They're encouraged to study together as a group, to test each other on the things they don't know. Nobody in this program withholds information from their colleagues to get ahead." Nina also said that the students are diverse and have very varied backgrounds. They range in age from mid-twenties to early fifties. Some are Physical Therapists, athletic trainers, surgical technicians and nurses, while others are teachers, graduates of foreign medical schools, or come from other types of careers. One student was born in China and two are from Kenya.

A Leader Down in the Trenches: Meet Department Chair Dr. Patrick Auth



*Dr. Patrick Auth
PA Department Chair*

Drexel's Physician Assistant Program, which is known for its diversity, mission, community engagement, and outstanding curriculum, owes much of its success to a leader who never stops innovating. Dr. Patrick Auth (PhD, MS, PA-C), Associate Clinical Professor and Physician Assistant Department Chair, believes wholeheartedly that the methodologies and approaches used by the program's instructors have had a significant impact in each student's achievements during the program and beyond.

Upon completing Drexel's PA Program (then belonging to Hahnemann University), Dr. Auth began his career as a Physician Assistant at Germantown Orthopedics in Philadelphia. Soon after, he transferred

to St. Joseph's Hospital in North Philadelphia, where he would spend the next 15 years. "My professional mission has always been to provide care to the underserved. The patients at St. Joseph's came from an underserved community, so that is a major thread in my professional experience as an educator," Dr. Auth said. Up until last year, he was still working in a clinical capacity at St. Agnes Hospital in emergency medicine in addition to being an instructor. Dr. Auth has been teaching in the PA Program for more than 20 years.

Drexel's Program has long been mission-driven with a special focus on serving the underserved. Each year, all juniors in the program are required to complete a rotation in one of these communities, as well as give a health education presentation. Dr. Auth noted that Drexel's curriculum, which promotes cultural competency, violence and disease prevention, and geriatrics, is especially unique compared to those of other colleges and universities. "We want faculty to reflect the diversity of our student body. We view students as partners in education, and our goal is to help them find the skill sets to surpass their personal standards," he added. "We go about our business and as a result, do great things without even knowing it. We aren't afraid to make curricular changes based on what our patients need, and are always reassessing our curriculum to meet the needs of the next generation."

Dr. Auth is a humble leader and his colleagues in the Department describe him as reluctant to tout his own accomplishments. Clinical professor Nina Multak said, "Pat is a leader who leads by example. He's been involved in PA education for a long time and is also an alumnus of this very program. He uses his initiative and history here to create a strong network and move us forward. As Program irector, the network he has built here defines his leadership."

Assistant clinical professors Gretchen Fox and Rosalie Coppola said, "Pat is tremendously supportive of both students and faculty and he's one of the main reasons that we're all still working here. He is working hard all of the time and gets down in the trenches with the rest of us. He is always advocating for the PA profession. He also commits to teaching during the first quarter so that he can get to know each student from the beginning. He's not just the director; he's developed this community and makes all of us leaders."

Simulation for PA Education and Assessment



Nina Multak

"We were using Standardized Patients and simulation back in the mid-90s. Our students were required to complete Standardized Patient exercises before graduation. Back then, it was a way for us to evaluate what the students had learned. Now, though, we're using it as an education tool in every single course," said Nina Multak, Assistant Clinical Professor in the PA Department.

At the College of Nursing and Health Professions, students have access to a state-of-the-art simulation lab, which includes case and scenario building software, Standardized Patient actors, and a critical skills lab. The facility offers both education and assessment opportunities for students and provides research opportunities for faculty. For the Physician Assistant Program, the teamwork building activities completed in the lab contribute significantly to the interprofessional aspect of the curriculum. PA students and faculty are also given the chance to conduct research in the Simulation Lab with four partnering PA programs in the Philadelphia region.

The Simulation Lab provides a safe place for students to make errors, review medical scenarios, collaborate on issues, and improve their skills communicating with doctors, nurses, fellow PAs, and other health professionals. Nina said, "It bridges the educational experience from classroom to hands-on patient exposure while maximizing their safety. It also provides a chance to educate students about the intersecting roles of each profession in the clinical setting." In a very structured manner, Simulation Lab exercises help PA students see role delineations and learn to work as a team.

Faculty members worked together to develop a curricular thread that uses Standardized Patients in each didactic course as well as in clinical rotations. Students conduct patient histories not as a test but for practice, and the faculty use Standardized Patients to provide feedback to their students. The students take a medical history, conduct a physical exam, and counsel the Standardized Patients. Manikins, on the other hand, are used to simulate a variety of problems during interdisciplinary exercises with students from other programs and with medical school students. Working as a team helps PA students build an understanding of how everyone works together in real life settings.

PA Department Welcomes New Faculty Member Juanita Gardner

Juanita A. Gardner, MPH, BS, PA-C, joined the PA Department faculty in May 2012. In her role, she facilitates small group learning, teaches in the classroom setting, conducts site visits, creates relationships with new clinical rotation sites in urban and rural underserved communities, and promotes diversity throughout the department at the PA profession. Juanita also serves as a member of the Internal Advisory Board for Interdisciplinary Clinical Practice at the College.

Juanita has worked as a primary care clinician, site supervisor, and program manager in community health centers. She has also taught respiratory anatomy and physiology to inner city high school students who suffer from asthma and developed a teen mentoring and health education program for inner city youths.

Before she came to the College, Juanita provided care to Native Americans on a rural Arizona Navajo reservation, chaired the Emergency Preparedness Committee for student health services at the University of Pennsylvania, and developed diabetes and COPD clinics in Edinburgh, Scotland, where she has lived for the past five years. She has won the Southbridge Medical Advisory Council Commitment Award, the SHERO Award for Community Services and Mentoring Youth, and the Southbridge Medical Advisory Council Award for Healthcare to the Underserved. She received the Sherry Stolberg Alumni of the Year Award from Drexel University in 2012. Please join the PA Department in welcoming Juanita to the College!

The Givers: PA Student Society Works to Improve Lives



The Wilbur B. Oaks Physician Assistant Student Society was named for Dr. Oaks, an internal medicine PA who retired from the College's PA Program faculty two years ago and was instrumental in starting the Program here in 1971. While the Student Society once focused much of its attention on planning fun social events for the Physician Assistant classes, it is now very community service-oriented. "During the last couple of years, one of the things I felt was important was that the Student Society was donating money to a charity," Julie Kinzel shared. Julie is both a PA Program instructor as well as the faculty advisor for the Student Society. "Rather than solely being responsible for the senior celebration," she went on, "the students are now focused on charity more than planning parties. The last class donated more than \$4,000 to the Salvation Army Red Shield Family Shelter to help them build a playground for the children who stayed there with their mothers." Each class of PA students at Drexel chooses an organization to support. The current class has chosen the Children's Crisis Treatment Center as the recipient of their fundraising efforts.

The Student Society gets creative in the ways they raise funds and awareness for the organizations and agencies they support. In the past, the students have hosted jewelry parties, designed t-shirts and sweatshirts, created patches for their white coats, and hosted bar nights where they received a large monetary reward for bringing the most guests into the establishment. In addition to fundraising, members of the PA Student Society regularly manage tables at health fairs, blood drives, and blood pressure screenings. This week (PA Week) is a particularly active time for the students in this regard.