FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK:

PA Week Elicits Nostalgia, Memories of Our Professional Journeys & Passion to Serve

Dear Readers,

Nostalgia is defined as a sentimental longing or affection for the past, typically for a period or place with positive personal associations. National Physician Assistant Week or “PA Week,” celebrated every October, elicits memories of one of the happiest times of my life, and I am taken back to the 27 months of PA school. The friends made, new experiences, excitement for the future, deep connection to my “WHY,” and even the mental and physical struggle… it all left a lasting impact on my heart and mind. Some may roll their eyes, but I would go back and do it all again if given the chance. Though it can bring a sense of sadness knowing I will never be able to relive those years, some of the best of my life, it reminds me what a blessing it is to serve others.

My parents tell me that when asked as a child what I wanted to be when I grew up, I answered, “A doctor” and never wavered. Year after year the answer was always the same. Then, being a doctor was the only profession I was aware of that allowed me to take care of people. I am not sure why I wanted to care for others from such a young age, but my parents say I would pretend my dolls were patients and I’d give them a fake ailment and find a way to cure them. Maybe it was a precursor for what was to come.

Around age 19, still well before I had heard of the term PA, I was diagnosed with a chronic medical condition. I was the youngest patient my doctor had treated for this condition at the time of my diagnosis. Over the next three years, this condition would completely change my life in every way. My diet, activities, sleep…everything was affected. I underwent numerous surgeries and procedures in hopes of gaining back some quality of life, and my specialist’s office became my second home. It seemed every person in the office knew me by first name, which is telling considering it was a university specialty department with hundreds of patients coming in and out daily.

I had become the dolls I once gave pretend ailments to, but my condition was real, and I couldn’t cure myself. I relied on others to make me better mentally and physically. Some weeks, going to my appointment was the best part of my week. The people my parents entrusted to take care of me became family and their compassion was just as impactful as the treatments I received. Going through an experience where you feel helpless makes you appreciative for the kindness and compassion of others. Experiencing that and knowing the impact it had on my health made me even more determined to live a life of service. I wanted to be that person for someone else.

I had no idea what a PA was and how strongly I would feel drawn to the profession until the summer after I received my undergraduate degree.

SDPA State Affiliate Events

Michigan Dermatology Physician Assistants (MiDPA)
MiDPA’s 17th Annual Conference
April 23, 2022
Somerset Inn
Troy, Michigan
https://midermpa.com/annual-conference/

Florida Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants (FSDPA)
2023 New Wave Dermatology Conference
May 18-21, 2023
The Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg St. Petersburg, Florida
https://fsdpa.org/new-wave-dermatology/
people feel and look better has turned out to be just as fun. Fourteen years in practice and I wake up feeling like I am living out my dream. I don’t second guess my decision to attend PA school over medical school. I never will. I know I have positively impacted the patients I have treated, partly due to my inherent passion for the specialty, but largely due to the compassion I learned from my experience as a patient. That experience has left a lasting impression on my life, which in turn positively benefits my patients.

This year, and every year during PA Week, I look back at my journey and remember what led me here. I hope it spurred nostalgia of your own journey. The road that led us here likely varies dramatically, but the destination of service is the same.

May you take pride in all that you have accomplished and the lives you have positively impacted through this career we all call our passion.

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I was prepared to attend medical school but took a gap year to get more medical experience. That experience ended up changing my career plans and life. Initially planning to follow a dermatologist all summer, his health took him out of clinic, and I was instead put with the PA. Initially disappointed I had to follow the PA, I quickly found myself in awe of the provider-patient relationship I witnessed. I was so impressed with the PA’s knowledge, skills, and bedside manner. The time he took to explain their condition and treatment plan and the appreciation and comfort on the patients’ faces was nothing short of remarkable. The relationship between the PA and his patients reminded me of the care I came to appreciate during the previous few years and day by day I fell in love with the profession. By the end of the summer, applying to PA school was my new plan.

Attending the PA Program at University of Alabama at Birmingham was one of the best decisions of my life. My class of 31 students became my family. Studying, meals, weekend activities, holidays, exercise…I had a core group of friends that did everything together in those years. Literally everything. It was the college experience I never experienced due to my health condition during my undergraduate years. Was it mentally and physically taxing? Of course. But every day I went to class or a rotation I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

Though no longer playing with dolls, making real